



Pier Paolo Pasolini

THE DREAM OF A THING

Conceived and written in 1948-1949, "The Dream of a Thing" was published only in 1962. Thus it found itself being, at the same time, a debut and final novel, a preparatory cartoon for a narrative season and a final rethinking on the validity of that experiment. Three Friulian boys on the threshold of their twenties live their brief youth and face the world: the poverty of their origins, the escape to Yugoslavia, the peasant struggles, emigration..., but also friendship, love, solidarity. It begins with the thrill of a party, it ends with the sadness of a death: "the best of youth" is already over.

<http://cultura-non-a-pagamento.blogspot.it/>

Copyright Garzanti Editore s.p.a. 1962, 1970, 1987.

In this series First edition: April 1987

Fourth edition: September 1993

Conceived and written in 1948 and 1949, that is, before *Ragazzi di vita* and *Una vita violenta*, *The Dream of a Thing* was published only in 1962. Thus it found itself being, at the same time, a debut and final novel, a cartoon preparatory to a narrative season and final rethinking on the validity of that experiment.

Three Friulian boys on the threshold of their twenties live their brief youth and face the world: the poverty of their origins, the escape to Yugoslavia, the peasant struggles, emigration..., but also friendship, love, solidarity. It begins with the exhilaration of a party, it ends with the sadness of a death: "the best of youth" is already over.

Presentation

by Edoardo Albinati

Perhaps the secret of this novel lies in a time mismatch.

The dream of a thing was conceived and written by Pasolini in 1948 and 1949, that is, before *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) and *Una vita violenta* (1959); but it was published later, in 1962. Thus it finds itself being, at the same time, a debut and final novel, a preparatory cartoon for a narrative season and a final rethinking on the brevity and richness of that experiment. Who, in 1962, read the Dream - which Pasolini had appropriately "restored, painted and framed"

in view of the publication - he could not help but read it in contrast to the other two, the Roman novels, obtaining from it the ambiguous sensation of being dragged back in time, towards a fixed point from which, however, time had continued to flow forward, grinding the years, destroying and

"restoring", to the point of creating an unbridgeable distance which was the distance between a peasant Italy that had just emerged from the war (1948) and an Italy that had just entered the neo-industrial age (1962). That distance was, so to speak, integrated by Pasolini into his novel, of which he "restored" not only the form but above all the object, which had been shattered, pulverized in that short space of years: that is, the peasant universe. Written in 1948 as a real idyll, in direct contact with a rural world that the writer did not need

to investigate since he was immersed in it up to his neck, only fourteen years later could the novel be read as a polemical and provocative manifesto in favor of a defeated, destroyed reality, to which Pasolini had first given the impression of turning his back, moving into the city in *Ragazzi di vita* and *A violent life*; and to which he now returned as one returns to a ruined house, polemically backdating his own style, that is, not dissolving the rustic and sincerely elegiac aura of the first draft, but strengthening it with a prose tone that is both heartfelt and combative, I would almost say Manzoni-esque .

Even the political plan thinned out in the distance, only to then re-emerge with an almost archaeological colouring, weakened from the point of view of events but strengthened on the level of ethics for which every people's struggle is in and of itself heroic and eternal, exemplary. The novel, which was initially called *The Best of Youth* (a title that later happily migrated to poems in Friulian dialect), took on another title during the work of the

1950s, The Days of the De Gasperi Award, which pays a debt to neorealism and proves to be disproportionate. if we think about what the real topic covered in the book is: the strength, the vitality of tradition, as it is transmitted in the blood of the communist kids who fight, perhaps without knowing it, so that the laws of that traditional order are subverted.

The historical episode - that is, the protest of the Friulian laborers for the application of a war benefit, the occupation of the landowners' villas, the skirmishes against the employers' police, etc. - functions, in the novel, a bit like those posts which are planted next to fruit trees to make them stand upright: but what matters is the tree, not the pole, even if the pole is certainly a heroic pole. Eventually it gets wrapped up in branches and leaves and is almost no longer seen.

It must also be said that this pole is ensconced in a plot which is not exactly a plot, but rather a broad scene, a chorus of figurines, a short treatise on physiognomy and sociology drawn up and

then dissolved in colors within the frame of a Flemish painting. The protagonists would be the three boys Milio Eligio and Nini, and perhaps the poor Cecilia Faedis, who will end up, as she should, worn out by love, in a convent: but what reigns supreme in this saga of the poor are the convivial scenes: the pedaling in flocks from one town to another, the religious processions, the pissing sessions which are also religious - all in a row, with their backs turned, along a bank -, the eating of polenta, the getting drunk inside the hot and fumigating stable of the Faedis. In the big picture even the misfortunes, Breughel teaches, are diminished by a measure of fatality and irony, because, let's be clear, even in Pasolini there are doses of stylistic irony, only that they leave intact his immoderate passion towards the minority of those characters .

And here we are at the point that makes this book fatally relevant. Even more than in the novels of the Roman underclass, Pasolini's famous "contradictions" seem alive to us in The Dream of a Thing. And we don't notice it for the pure pleasure of marking a laceration, but because never before has Pasolini been as tense as here in a Herculean effort to reconcile the dilemma, and at the same time laboriously bent over to mend, with minute style, the wound. The image is precisely of someone who "takes

charge": who takes charge of a peasant condition and of an ideology which, of necessity, to come true politically, must untie and destroy that knot of ancient civilization. If it is true that the people resist only because they are subjugated, and their beautiful virtues are preserved uncontaminated in the shelter of domination, they will fade, they will fade rapidly once removed from the cellar and exposed to the light of class liberation. OR

they will vanish anyway, even if this liberation does not occur; as a result of the refraction of a "modern" light which is not always, indeed almost never, produced by socialism.

And the same problems recur on the stylistic side. The passage, for example, Pasolini often finds himself resolving pictorially in the ways of art prose, creating

backgrounds of extraordinary compactness against which the current of the novel breaks and calms down as if passing through a series of locks one after the other. An example? The following. «A sad and dark morning descended on San Giovanni; over the mud and puddles of the day before, which had remained intact during the hours of sleep, the sky burned without light, obstructed by low, white clouds, motionless like the mud and puddles, and against whose light the walls of smoky stones, the poles, the roofs of San Giovanni were dark, wet, in a silence that the rare crowing of the cocks, in the courts of Braida or Romans, made more squalid..." (page 25 of the second volume). The novel is full of these immense canvases that rise up before the eye, and there is no journey by Nini or procession of laborers that does not have as its background, painted with slow care, the blue crown of the Friulian mountains. At a lower level, in the sentence, Pasolini softens and makes the prosody oscillate so that it mimics the peasant hesitation, the modesty of the lowered eyes and the hat turned in the hand, for example with the almost obsessive interlude in the first pages of the novel of «a little», «a little».

«... he was already a little drunk» «he had a somewhat ironic and provocative air», «they danced a boogie-woogie... which scandalized a little, but made them laugh, the old women who were keeping an eye on the girls", "their joy was a little forced...". And over the whole novel, in short, a veil of protective glaze is thrown, probably useless for preserving it, like

those films that are placed on monuments and under which the stone worm continues to work undisturbed, to corrode: and here it is the contrasting forces of the ancient and the modern. The same regret ends up corroding the old, consumes it, weakens it, the stylistic compactness is unable to keep the pieces of the "thing" together, except, precisely, in a "dream", intensely dreaming of that "thing" ...

Be that as it may, the stylistic enamel increases the effect of distance mentioned at the beginning, and Pasolini seems to

perfectly aware of opening and closing his fictional parable with the same gesture.

Indeed, it is precisely the very profound awareness of the disagreement that removes from the book the burden of the duplicate, of the archaeological forgery, and accomplishes the true miracle of a book that is innocent without being so, of a creaturely novel that is very moving, but no less polemical. .

Edoardo Albinati

THE DREAM OF A THING

Our motto must therefore be: reform of conscience not through dogmas, but through the analysis of conscience that is not clear to itself, whether it presents itself in a religious or political form. It will then appear that the world has long dreamed of one thing...

K. Marx, from a letter to Ruge, from Kreutznach (September 1843)

Part one: 1948

1

From the morning, if the day is clear, the provincial road and the country lanes that lead to Casale are filled with people going to the Easter Monday festival. Little by little the immense clearings, still of a winter green, cold and light, colored here and there by some pink peach branches, are

swarming with people walking, having fun, playing, running; the horses freed from the carts trot grazing along the ditches, ridden by some boy dressed for the holidays; the children run waving their swords of stripped branches among the large bicycle sheds, and the little girls with their orange, purple or green blouses play calmly under the newly budded elder trees. The dance platforms are still empty and the thousand paper flags, suspended from the strings of the lamps, barely move in the very light air blowing from the sea. To the north the circle of Carnia mountains sinks into the shiny and veiled whiteness of the first days of spring.

From Ligugnana, Rosa and San Giovanni, which were their towns, without knowing about each other, Nini Infant, Milio Bortolus and Eligio Pereisson had set out since the early hours of the afternoon with their companies towards the party.

They had known each other, it is true, for a long time now, by sight, because they had met at many other festivals, and all three were part of the best youth on the right bank. Nini arrived in Casale by bicycle with his companion from Ligugnana; on the handlebars he had planted a hawthorn branch, and since he was already a little drunk in the morning, not a girl passed that he did not attack with crazy and gallant shouts. She was in great mood:

as soon as he arrived in Casale he threw his bicycle into the safe with the gesture of someone who feels like one of the protagonists of the party, albeit a foreigner, and the boys in the safe immediately took an air of helpful, light-hearted and slightly ironic sympathy towards him.

Leaving the bicycle in their hands, and holding a single sprig of almond which he placed between his lips, he immediately went to take possession of the environment.

No less rowdy than him, meanwhile a company of boys aged between fifteen and twenty arrived from Rosa, with jackets over their shoulders and shirts with large colored stripes around their chests; among them, blond, slightly wavy, with two eyes that seemed like blue crystal, Milio pedaled with his harmonica slung over his shoulder, and as soon as his company had

gotten rid of their bicycles, as Nini had done, he furiously took a step forward. double, amidst the laughter and shouts of his companions.

Then the third arrived, Eligio Pereisson, standing on the cart full of girls and boys; he led the white horse that shook its head as it skidded through the crowd; Meanwhile the girls sang, waving their handkerchiefs and almond twigs that they had torn off along the way; as soon as they reached the clearing of the festival, the girls pushed and shouted and swarmed away and Eligio remained to take care of the horse helped by his brother Onorino. When everything was in order he turned around to look for his companions who had disappeared in the confusion.

Nini, Eligio, Milio were all of the age in which an accordion is an important thing: that was how they met, through Milio's accordion, which, under two hawthorn bushes, was playing among his companions, and the Nini was already there with her hands in her pockets listening to him. He looked a little ironic and provocative, and it seemed that he was about to say something: perhaps it was a criticism of the double step, or an observation, or perhaps a compliment.

However he had a very confident and cheerful look; but

Rosa's other boys had almost not noticed him: not so Milio, however, who had spotted him immediately and was now playing with particular ardor, giving it his all, almost as if he were playing for him.

Meanwhile the other had also approached, and had gone to stand next to Nini: they looked at each other furtively, but didn't have the courage to start a conversation. Suddenly, however, Rosa's youth decided to go elsewhere, perhaps towards the platforms of the dance (which had not yet begun) or perhaps towards the shack of the tavern: and they dragged Milio with them who continued to play. Left alone near the hawthorns, Nini and Eligio took another look at each other and it was Nini who finally made up his mind: "You're from San Giovanni, right?"

he asked.

"Yes," replied the other gallant. «And if I'm not mistaken, she's from Ligugnana: we've seen each other many times for festivals...» «On Sunday I met him in Mure, with a beautiful girl: I know her, she's from Gruaro... and she had a partner very beautiful, too, who I have never managed to talk to..." "Maybe they'll come here today," said Eligio, "if you want, I can let you meet her..."

«Very good then! Shall we go for a drink?" "Let's go!"

made Eligio happy.

By now the friendship was made: the two young people had wanted to get to know each other for so long that they looked at each other: once there had even almost been a quarrel between them due to an involuntary push they had given each other while dancing: and it had been since then that they loved each other. Now, after the first words, an enthusiasm began to enter their conversations, a warmth that made everything beautiful: the idea of going for a drink, the most common one could have at that moment, seemed stupendous to him; and especially after they had drunk not one, but two or three glasses of wine, they hung on each other's lips as if certain things, the organization of a festival, the skill of a dance band and the girls of Gruaro, they were

topics covered for the first time since the creation of the world.

Nini was light-hearted, Eligio was mad: but at that moment they both had a very severe, almost proud air; they laughed with the appearance of laughing among themselves at very special events, which the other young people around had to listen to with admiration.

Gruaro's two sisters arrived after half an hour and, spotting them, they immediately ran to approach them: Eligio was laughing with his blond face just a little reddish and the blue blades of his transparent eyes, but, having approached the two girls, he stopped suddenly almost serious and after greeting them with the confidence of an old friend, he said: "I want to introduce you to a companion of mine!"

Nini stood a little apart with his capricious and shining smile. Eligio put a hand on his shoulder and said his name: «Nini», and then Nini approached, politely held out his hand and repeated, with an embarrassment hidden behind the fresh impertinence: «Giovanni Infant, I am very pleased to meet you. » And they, happy, said their names in turn and very ceremoniously. They were beautiful and well-dressed: with their brown hair permed in fashion two or three years before; abundant, moreover, up to the shoulders; beautiful breasts equally abundant, under the light dresses, one blue and the other brown, worn for the first time the previous day which was Easter, and still as immaculate as on the tailor's table. Indeed, they were the seamstresses themselves, and in fact their hands were not red and they had something in their behavior that made them different from the peasant women. It was exactly what Nini and Eligio needed; they immediately took on an air of protection and unscrupulousness: they too wanted to appear to be something better than peasants; Nini was in fact wearing a cowboy shirt, and Eligio an American one the same blue as his eyes.

The little band had begun to play: the music spread cheerfully around, dispersing across the prairies.

The two couples were just waiting for this, and started dancing from the first round; they were alone on the platform, with only another pair of two young men, perhaps two of the revelers; and the eyes of the children and young people who had immediately flocked around the platform were focused on them. They were two good dancers, the kind who give life to a party. They immediately demonstrated their skill, right from the third or fourth lap, on the half-empty platform, with the excuse of taking advantage of the free space: they danced a boogie-woogie that enchanted the beardless spectators, and scandalized a little, but making them laugh, the old mothers who kept an eye on the girls. Nini and Eligio wanted to be superior to themselves so they could admire each other. Once the tour was over, they looked for each other among the other couples and went under the little band's hut to chat, mentioning certain new dance steps that they were the only ones who knew.

They were close to the orchestra and could ask for the songs they wanted. The violinist, who was the director, a dark and funny young man from

Rosa, knew them both; and every now and then he leaned towards them, to say some joke: a new source of admiration for the two foreigners on the part of their young peers and youngsters.

Milio appeared on the platform for only half an hour together with an unknown girl; he wasn't a great dancer, like Nini and Eligio: and he remained a little in the shadows.

Then, after several glances exchanged with the two unknown friends, he left.

They found him again after dinner. Gruaro's two sisters were gone. The girls were scarce, the ones from San Giovanni who came with Eligio were not capable of dancing. They were in a crowd, with Eligio's younger brothers, Onorino and Livo; and there was a great crowd on the platform. Nini and Eligio walked up and down the crowd together with their companions, who yes

were presented. They danced little; they rather enjoyed being insolent with the girls from Codroipo. That's how they came across Rosa's company. It was a very cheerful company, in the mood for great things: they seemed like arsonists, trying to set something on fire, make a big bonfire out of it to demonstrate to those from Casale or Codroipo how much the youth of the other bank of the Tagliamento was worth. They had found nothing to burn: however, judging by the brightness of their eyes, it was as if they had done so. Nini and Eligio, when they spotted Milio with him in the crowd, shouted: «Hey, guys!», And they replied: «Hey!» Thus, the other friendship of the day was made.

Milio grabbed his accordion and intoned a marching Te Deum. By now the shack was taking the right path. They went to the tavern and there they confirmed their friendship: they made quick and cheerful conversations with the warmth that made everything beautiful and new; then, as the atmosphere lit up, we got to the jokes: it was still the calm phase of the speeches. Eligio was a magnificent joke teller: everyone laughed excitedly when they heard him, concluding each time with the same regular guffaw; all the most daring things were reviewed: it was a kind of exam which the three new friends passed with special praise. Then we moved on to the

singing period: it was an infernal choir, Rosa's people, who had been drunk for some time now, sang like damned one song after another, the most impious they knew. When the repertoire seemed exhausted, there was always someone who started a song even more lively than the previous one, if that were possible. Nini, inflamed by wine and light as a bird, kept the Mysteries in reserve for the right moment; and when Rosa's boys were squeezed, he attacked them.

Immediately the choir followed him, bellowing solemnly over the empty flasks and overturned glasses.

The night was already deep, it must have been at least one o'clock

half. The prairies were already almost empty; the dance was over, and the revelers were unscrewing the light bulbs from the tables. However, the branch shack would remain open for a while. It was the company from the other bank of the Tagliamento that kept morale high, making that shack a fair: Rosa's youngsters with their feet on the table continued to sing as much as they could, looking laughing into each other's eyes and every now and then swallowing a new sip of wine.

Nini was sitting on the lap of Basilio, his companion from Ligugnana, and sang with his eyes distraught and laughing and his coal-black curls shiny with sweat and brilliantine. Knowing a song was very important for all of them, and each one tried to impose his own songs in turn, but following those of his companions with gutted abandon.

Eligio Pereisson had the genius of song. He was sitting on the table, between the red glasses of wine, and was holding a broom in his hand as if it were a guitar. At a certain moment he started singing: what was he singing? Everyone, surprised, listened to him, without understanding anything.

It was a boogie rhythm, which Eligio cantava proprio come un negro: tving, ca ubang, bredar, lov, aucester, tving tving, morrou thear...

He was all curled up on the broom, crossing his legs; he looked his listeners in the eye, laughing, and never stopped laughing for a moment with those

fiery eyes of his that looked like two pieces of glass. You couldn't understand what he was singing, whether it was a joke or something crazy, in any case he never finished, and he always laughed, tapping a perfect rhythm with his fingers on the broom, and searching who knows where for the words and the tune: den breder tuinding fear... Then suddenly he stopped, with a loud laugh, throwing the broom away; the others, also laughing like crazy, resumed the chorus, but Eligio, gathered in his chair, after a while continued to sing

the mysterious song on its own.

Then suddenly Nini revived from his swoon; he stood up and shouted desperately:

«Down with those whores!» and she fell back onto Basilio's knees, swallowing a glass of wine.

The others shouted like him: «Down with women, long live the f...» And they sang a song learned from the Romagna soldiers in Casarsa: «I keep the pistol loaded with gold balls.» At this song Nini half-reopened his eyes, and looking straight ahead with the glass in his hand, confirmed: "Yes, sacramento sacramentoccio dog." He seemed extraordinarily happy to give this approval; then his eyes ran to his hand raised with the glass, they lingered there curiously and after an instant the glass, thrown at full force, smashed against the wall of the shack. «I'm happy, damn dog,»

he added. Eligio slowly took a glass, turned it over in his hands and sent it to join the other with a sharp bang.

The owner of the branch came grumbling to say that the glasses were expensive, and that they should stop; the other young men who crowded the hut turned towards the foreigners' table, with an expressionless expression, but precisely for this reason not without an element of threat. Nini considered himself very offended, and made some observations, both polite and resentful, which were nothing more than a preparation for much more stormy speeches. The master retorted, still in a subdued tone, but he too already had a certain nervousness.

Then Nini lashed out, taking it out on the entire country

«of rude and peasant people»; but the master left. Rosa's boys started singing again to end the brawl; However, Nini didn't take it for granted and continued to hurl insults at the locals.

Then suddenly it passed.

He and Milio looked at each other with great sympathy: but Milio was a little less drunk, and still reasoned with a certain

wisdom. So when at any moment Nini shouted to the company that he needed to piss and that he was going to piss under the table, Milio laughingly tried to stop him: but there was nothing to be done, Nini brought the chair closer to the table and kept his word. The others around him sang with renewed enthusiasm.

From Casale to San Giovanni there was about ten kilometers of road.

They went to the storage room where only their bicycles remained and a very sleepy young man was waiting for them. As soon as he saw the Nini he began to smile confidently, mischievously, and the drunken Nini looked him up and down. To sympathize, the other offered him a glass of wine, since even the young custodians had gone wild that evening, and there was half a flask of wine left. "From here,"

Nini shouted, "sacred..." He clung to his neck and drank, then dropped the flask on the ground and while the others took care of the bicycles, he finished the piss he had started in the bush, singing.

"Damn!" said the boy in charge and to show his cheerful amazement he bent over laughing almost to the ground. Eligio had been abandoned by his company from San Giovanni which had already left a few hours ago with the cart driven by his younger brothers: it had to be carried on the bicycle's rail. But he didn't want anyone else to struggle, and he wanted to be the one to pedal: so there was a long discussion between him and Milio. Eligio finally prevailed by saying that while he carried it, Milio could play the harmonica. Then Milio sat on the handlebars, rested his head on his new

partner's shoulder, and began to play. And the company set off towards the other bank of the Tagliamento amidst the shouts of the custodian boy and the revelers.

But the bike ride and the cold night air, instead of clearing up their minds, did nothing but get them even more drunk.

“These bicycle whores!” Nini shouted, seeing that his car was continually skidding towards the edge of the road, however

without ever surpassing it. Under the moonlight that shone across the prairies, they ran screaming like devils, only a little

perhaps unhappy that no one was there to hear them: in fact the road that from San Daniele led to the Venice-Udine road just below Codroipo is the most deserted in all of Friuli. On the left, under the moon, lay abandoned the powder magazine deposits, which once upon a time exploded from time to time, breaking the windows of all the neighboring villages. And Rosa's boys, touching them, seemed to want to evoke their ancient noise by deafening them. Then under the immense beam of blue and dusty light of the moon, the bed of the Tagliamento appeared boundless, from the mountains to the plain: the boys took the very long Delizia bridge at full speed, but after less than a hundred meters one of Rosa suddenly braked, threw the long, stretched out bicycle onto the asphalt as if it were a toy, shouting:

«Wait guys, I have a piss on my hands!»; everyone stopped and kept him company, lining up along the shoulder: Nini also sided with them, but after a moment he asked himself at the top of his lungs: «What am I doing here with the business in my hand? I don't need it any more! » He picked up the bicycle from the ground as if it were made of feathers and went off at full speed, singing. The others were laughing in lines along the bridge. "Let's give water to the Tagliamento," shouted Milio,

«which never has any!» At the first houses in Casarsa they started singing at the top of their lungs again.

They wanted to wake up the whole country. And when they were in the square, Milio, still leaning on Eligio and sitting on the handlebars, made them all shut up for a moment, with a shout, and with his accordion he started: «Forward people...» And everyone followed him screaming .

Milio and Nini did not go home with the others, but stayed in San Giovanni da Eligio for a while longer.

They entered Eligio's house like that of an old friend.

While he went to get the wine and some cheese, they started looking at the photographs stuck in the cupboard window, observing their cousins and friends, dressed to the nines, statuesque; while in the small kitchen, with the red brick floor, the beams in the smoked ceiling and the whitewashed walls, the thick silence of the last hours of the night reigned. The breathing of those who were sleeping could be heard in the upper rooms, while from the pigsty, every now and then, came the rooting of the sow who was dreaming. Eligio appeared with the flask and a piece of cheese.

"We'll have to eat polenta," he whispered, "the bread is finished."

They sat under the hearth, with their feet on the stone, and ate while talking. They didn't know what they were saying:

they conversed.

E

This

li

satisfied

immensely. When the mug was finished Milio and Nini took their leave of Eligio. He accompanied them to the courtyard door. "Goodbye Eligio," Nini shouted, "I greet you, goodbye, take care!" But after taking a few steps, he came back: "In fact, I want to give you a kiss," he said, "come here!" Eligio, laughing, offered him his cheek.

"No, sacrament on the mouth," said Nini, "we must kiss on the mouth." They kissed like two lovers.

«Goodbye Eligio!» the two shouted as they sped off on their bicycles.

"Goodbye, goodbye," Eligio shouted from the door, on the deserted street, struck by the moon.

«Goodbye Eligio!» Nini shouted once again, turning back.

2

At Enal the air burned; the last groups of young, and even elderly, drunk people were standing around the messy tables, damp from spilled wine. Fresh, dark spring air streamed in through the open windows. Everyone was shouting and shouting, dazed by the wine; Nini, Eligio and Milio were sitting around a table in the company of a group of boys from San Giovanni, and had begun the finale of their Sunday; their joy, however, was a little forced.

Everyone had many thoughts in their hearts and little money in their pockets.

Eligio then began to tell jokes and everyone gathered around his voice, which already with its tone aroused the desire to laugh, reserving their powerful laughter for the climactic moments. Then they began to sing: but two or three of the Romans left at the moment because it was now late and the next day, at dawn, the stable was waiting for them. Eligio's younger brothers, Onorino and Livo, with their friends, Chini, Ivano, also left, saying goodbye timidly, because they still had their shorts on. The others who remained never seemed to be able to completely free themselves from the thought that they had no more than fifty lire in their pockets; and that the other two or three hundred had blown away during the festival like smoke. Nini, one would have said, was singing his Mysteries alone: with his black head leaning against the wall and his knees pointed against the table. At a certain moment an old man approached them, with a glass in his hand.

"How's it going, young man?" she shouted at the boys shakily.

"Well, we and you?" Milio asked him.

"Puah, I'm old," he said, and winked with his eyes.

«Long live the f...» said Nini with his eyes closed. The old man then leaned over him and began to tell in his ear, but in a loud voice, so that everyone could hear, an episode involving women that had happened to him when he had emigrated to Germany before the other war. It was a rambling story, and when he had finished, Nini opened his eyes and said to him: "You're drunk, go to sleep!" "Drunk? I?" said the old man with a solemn and indignant air and bending down on his legs with the ridiculous gesture of a lawyer in mid-argument. «When I started drinking my two flasks of wine a day you weren't even in your mother's belly! remember!" "I will remember it!"

said Nini, shrugging his shoulders, and, closing his eyes, he began to sing again: «And I, who am small...» The old man turned to the whole company: «I toured all the Americas and all Germany when I had the your age!" he shouted, with a laughing face, swollen and red as fire.

“And what did you get out of it?” Eligio asked him, mockingly, but familiarly. Everyone, expecting him to talk about some greatness, prepared to laugh at it.

"A kick in the ass," replied the old man, and returned to his company, near the counter; but shortly after, little by little, he got closer.

“You young people,” he began to shout, “are idiots.

What are you doing in Italy! Italy! Ah, go, go! You can travel all over the world, but you will never find rubbish like in Italy. The Italian is a thief. If he can screw you, he screws you in every way. And the poor are worse than the rich. All it takes is for a guy to have two bucks in his pocket for him to forget his companions and start acting like a pig himself. Away, away, youth, away abroad! Do like me, guys, who have traveled all over the world, the Americas, Belgium, Germany! Go away guys from this

sacrament of an Italy. Do like me, who came back poorer than before and with lice.» Everyone laughed; the old man did a pirouette, as if to leave again among the company of the elderly, Pieri

Susanna, the secretary of the section, Blasut and the others chatting at the desk. But when he was already half turned, his eyes focused on the group of boys and, staring at them seriously, he said, with an astute and confidential air: «Look at the other day... Domenico's son... that blond... . what is his name ...»

"Rico," said Eligio.

«Yes, Rico, Rico,» exclaimed the old man, «he had to go to Argentina and had booked his place on the ship that left in August last year... But two or three days before leaving he receives a letter where he written that his place on the ship had been given to someone who had to go up on behalf of the Government... Eh, eh, do you know what had happened? You, dark-haired..." "Me?" said Nini, «what do you want me to know?

Let's make do!" «Eh, eh, none other than someone from the Government! The job had been taken by a guy who could have ten or twelve thousand lire to pass on to the agency guy. This is what Italian is like.» "AND

wouldn't you do the same?" Eligio said laughing.

«The other day», continued the old man, «a new letter arrives at Rico where it is written, oh dear, that this time too the position had been taken by someone from the Government: he was supposed to leave this March and he is still at home. He had asked for a loan of two hundred thousand francs from the bank for the trip, he has been at home for a year, without work and he has eaten almost everything. Luckily he had a friend in Genoa who told him that with ten or twelve thousand lire he too could be passed off as someone from the Government! "As,"

continued the old man, from the door jamb that led to the little room with the desk, «a wretch in some other town in Italy, you will see a letter arrive where it is written that his place has been reserved for someone from the Government. And this guy from the Government is Rico, Domenico's guy!»

He headed towards the old men for the third time, skipping; then as soon as he was in the other room he reared up and turning threateningly towards the boys he whispered:

«Kill them all!» and he ran his hand like a knife close to it gola.

«Kill them all!» he repeated shouting, and returned to his company, after winking once again at the young men.

At that moment Jacu, Eligio's cousin, came in, drunk, and heard the old man's last words.

"Kill them all, my dear," he said too and dropped into a chair next to Eligio.

"How are you doing, cousin," he said.

"It's like when you don't have a penny in your pocket," he said, and took a wallet out of the inside pocket of his jacket, opened it carefully and, apart from a few photographs and his identity card, showed that it was empty.

"Hey, comrade," Nini shouted, "courage!" He got up, poured a glass of wine and said to him: "Drink and ruin everything!"

Jacu emptied his glass with one gulp, put his wallet back in his pocket and repeated: "Kill them all." "Cheer up," Eligio told him cheerfully, "the time will come when we'll make him pay! But in the meantime it's useless to take it this way!» The old man from before, wobbly and with his hat on his head, had come closer again, and was laughing fixedly and mischievously with his eyes on Jacu; he stayed like that for a while, then leaned over him and murmured with a grimace: "Strap!" "Die," Jacu told him, livid from drunkenness and the skin on his face almost green. "Those days are gone," the old man shouted, sneering, "when you went to work at Todt!" «Why didn't you and your son go there?»

said Jacu contemptuously, "we all went there." "And he," said Eligio,

«He didn't even care about the bombings: it was nice, eh, to go to Campofornido!» But the old man didn't even listen to them: rubbing his index finger and thumb, he shouted to the whole company: «Money, money! How many trains have you robbed in Casarsa, you from San Giovanni? Huh? Why? Were the Germans shooting at the stars?» And he did a triumphant pirouette. “Should we have let them take everything to Germany?” Milio said with an air of

enough.

"Forget this idiot of an old man," said Nini.

"You, dark-haired man," said the old man calmly, without ever ceasing to grin, "with what money did you go and have fun the other year?" «With the money I earned working!» "And what were you doing?" the old man asked seriously.

Nini started laughing. "The cook at the English command in Casarsa," he said.

"Now the plenty is over, the plenty is over," shouted the old man. "Now the English have gone to England, and the Arar fields are closed." "And thank the Lord," said Eligio, "so your son no longer risks being caught and shot for going and stealing tires." "You," said the old man, pointing his finger at him, "didn't you work at the Arar?" “Yes,” Eligio said.

“And was it okay?”

«Maybe like this all my life!»

The old man blinked at him for a moment: then he undid the belt of his trousers and tightened it by three or four holes.

And he started laughing loudly.

"Go, go to sleep," Milio told him.

"Where are you from?" the old man asked him.

“Di Rosa, I am,” Milio said defiantly.

"And what do you do?"

«The farmer, I always have and always will.»

«Now», the old man declared, «there are no more cards, and the Triestines no longer come from Trieste. You have taken little flour from the owners, you sharecroppers! "What a talk," Milio said.

The old man, pulling his hat down over his eyes, ran towards the door that opened onto the street, laughing like a madman; then at the door he stopped, suddenly became serious, and leaning forward with a mysterious air towards the boys, he repeated in a low voice

voice: «Kill them all.» And she went down the street, singing.

Nini stood up and began his company's old song: "I keep the gun loaded with golden balls."

It had been a year now since Nini, Eligio and Milio had met, and they had been through a lot together since that Easter Monday when in Casale di Costa they had started by calling each other lei! In addition to the party of the class of '29, there had been festivals in all the surrounding towns, in Cintello, Savorgnano, Gleris, and then the famous one of S' Pietro e Paolo in Valvasone, and in Saletto, Morsano, Teglio, Cordovado ... In Cordovado it had been beautiful; after dancing all night and drinking, around two o'clock they decided to go for a swim.

They came shouting and singing to Pacher. The pond shone brightly under the stars. They quickly undressed in the middle of the woods and threw themselves naked into the water. It had just rained and the grass was wet, the branches of the acacias were dripping: everything shone under the moon. Rosa's boys, naked, ran among the trees to keep warm. Nini, putting on his underwear under the beam of moonlight, told the others about the girl from Ramuscello whom he had accompanied home, and Eligio, not believing him, mocked him...

Now the Easter holidays were back. "Tomorrow," Eligio shouted in the now half-empty ENAL, "we're going to Casale di Costa!"

«Cheer up!» Nini shouted happily.

«Well, these», Milio said instead, «are the last barracks, comrades. Here either starve or leave!» "Did you get your papers?" Eligio asked.

«Not yet: but they should arrive in a few days.»

"Maybe I'll go away too," said Nini, looking around.

"And where?" said Pieri Susanna who had approached: he was scratching his head under his cap in amazement, because it was the first time that Nini had mentioned emigrating, "and she said it with such bravado and lightness that it was impossible to take him seriously.

«In Yugoslavia», Nini replied with all simplicity, «there at least there is communism!» "You alone?" «No, in Ligugnana there are five or six of us who have this idea... And then there is someone else here», and he winked at Eligio. «But everything is still undecided... we'll see!» And he drank what little wine was left in the flask.

"Hey, comrade," Jacu shouted at him, "leave me a drop!"

There was still a little and Jacu sucked it from the neck of the flask.

They were now the last customers of Enal; the others had already left, but were still talking, in the street, in the cool and sonorous silence of Easter night.

3

On 14 July 1948 Nini and Eligio, with Antonio and Pietro Nonis, Basilio Nio and Germano Giacomuzzi, left Ligugnana to go to Yugoslavia.

Their whole company came to accompany them to the Casarsa station to catch the train, and to drink their last glass of white wine together: Milio

had brought the accordion, and they said goodbye by singing and shouting.

And crying too. But those were the days of hope: the war seemed far away and, for the youth, life was beginning.

Around four in the afternoon they arrived in Gorizia and to pass the time they wanted to climb the castle. From up there, at the top of the ramparts that rose above a hill, you could see along a green and blue expanse of hills and mountains, the border with Yugoslavia and Yugoslavia itself, as if asleep in the sun.

With their bundles at their feet, the boys looked silently towards that clear, blue horizon imbued with a light that took your breath away, along the curves of the pre-Alps, between woods, villages and clearings. Right below the castle, on the ridge of a hill, you could see no more than two or three hundred meters away, a white road, drawn between houses and vegetable gardens; men were walking there; a woman came to the window to flap a cloth. There was no longer Italy there: it seemed as if there was no more world, or that a completely new, free, luminous world was beginning.

The next day, early in the morning, they arrived in Cividale.

Leaving their luggage in a tavern, they went around the city in search of the man the man had told them about in Gorizia.

brother of Germanus. Instead of the man they found the police. AND

they were lucky to get around without luggage; they spent a good part of the morning and afternoon in the barracks and when they were released around five, they immediately resumed their searches.

But where to fish for man? The air was already getting dark and they were hungry. They headed towards the countryside, at random, and passed over the Devil's bridge, over the Natisone which shone under the clouded sky; from there they turned down a path that ran alongside the river along terraced meadows, between stone walls and thickets of brambles and elderberries. They sat down in an open space and began to eat the bread and salami they had in their pockets. Everyone was silent: they didn't say it, but

they were tired and dejected. Where could they find the man who could guide them? And, in the meantime, where could they have gone to sleep that night? Nini, as usual, seemed to be doing everything for fun, he shrugged his shoulders and said: "Oh dear, comrades, we'll get together!" They finally found, in the tavern where they had left their luggage, half drunk in front of a liter of black wine, a man who after a bit of chatter offered to guide them across the border.

It was now eleven in the evening; He said, taking them out into the courtyard, that they should go ahead and wait for him in a place just beyond the town, at the foot of the mountain. It was raining; they waited for a long time in the rain, on the ridge, among the plants. Finally, when they were no longer waiting for him, the man came down from the mountain.

"It's a six or seven hour walk," he said. They began to walk, with their heavy bundles, heading towards the interior of the Collio; the man was drunk.

They walked like this all night, and the march was very difficult, because you couldn't see two steps away, the path was full of stones and the branches of the trees banged against your face. It was raining hard.

The path always ran through the woods; only by a lot

at times he passed through a clearing on a steep slope; then it happened that the thick darkness was interrupted a little and the view could extend into the void of a valley or along the sides of the mountains black with woods. Many times we had to leave the road and push through the thick trees, along paths that were barely distinguishable.

Around dawn the Slovenian said: "Here guys, this is the border." For his work he wanted six thousand lire and went back.

They continued walking towards the place he had indicated: but they found nothing. They walked for another four hours, and the border could not be seen. It was already morning and it was still raining; wet and sleepy, they ate a piece of bread while sitting on the rocks.

After a while they resumed their march. «We will now be in Yugoslavia!» said Nini, "we will have crossed the border by now!"

However, nothing had changed around: always the same forest, and, from time to time, the valleys and mountains that appeared to the gaze in always the same views, lost in silence and solitude.

Nini, who had now gradually convinced himself that he had crossed the border, no longer showed signs of tiredness, and walked happily and lightly, occasionally shouting to the other boys: "Cheer up comrades, we are in Yugoslavia!" Germano, on the other hand, who was walking at the head of the company, tall and thin, with his big partisan hair, still seemed uncertain and Nini mocked him. He was excited, and almost started singing; after all, the others also already felt almost calm, and had taken out a cigarette, to each smoke a little. Suddenly - they were walking through a valley, and it was almost daylight - they saw the Italian flag two or three hundred meters away, and, below, a sentry. They gasped; this time there was no joke. They threw themselves on the ground, and remained for some time

stop in the bushes.

"What do we do?" said Nini.

"You're starting to speak more slowly," Basilio muttered angrily.

«Stop!» Germano said to the two Nonis who were looking towards the place where the flag was flying.

Luckily it had stopped raining for half an hour, and the July sun was clearing the sky. They stood still for a while, not knowing what to do. Finally Nini made up his mind.

"I'm going," he said, "I'm not going back to Italy!"

"Street!" Germano whispered.

They crawled among the bushes and trees of the fairly dense forest, climbing up the slope. When they were far out of the sentry's sight, they

began to run, staying hunchbacked and always trying to keep under the shelter of the branches; so it was that without knowing it they ran past the row of white border posts.

They walked quickly for about twenty minutes, then, in the middle of a clearing, they found a man, perhaps a woodcutter, and they asked him if they were in Italy or Yugoslavia.

He looked at them without saying anything, and soon after walked away behind the bush. He had gone to call the Slavs. The boys sat down on the grass: Eligio lay down on it, even though it was wet, and after a minute he was asleep. The others smoked in silence. They didn't say it, but they were worried and thought of their home, of Ligugnana, of San Giovanni, so far away now, in another time; and their companions, over there, who at that moment, with the first sun, as soon as they got out of bed, found themselves in the schoolyard chatting...

But after less than a quarter of an hour the woodsman appeared with a Slavic soldier armed with a machine gun. They were taken a kilometer away to the headquarters, where they were interrogated.

«Why did you emigrate illegally?» an officer asked.

«To work in Yugoslavia!» the boys promptly replied, that

they had the communist badge in their buttonhole and were proud of it. In fact, they had no doubt that the Slavs would immediately think about making them sleep and eat. Instead they were given the order to leave, and under the guidance of two armed soldiers, they had to cover eighteen kilometers of road, fasting and soaked as they were.

They walked as if in a dream, without understanding anything anymore.

Hills, woods, roads, unknown and almost deserted villages passed before their eyes.

First Germanus, and then the Nonis fell to the ground exhausted. The others helped them get up and walk, almost crying.

"Take heart, comrades," they said, "we will soon be there." Nini walked swearing. They arrived in Tolmin when it was already night. There they drove them for more than an hour across the country looking for a place to sleep. But nothing was found, and so they took them to a prison. It was already late: they slept on the floor, some in the kitchen, some in the corridors. The next morning they gave them some coffee and milk, and made them leave again, this time without an escort, with the order to go to Santa Lucia di Tolmino.

Once they reached Santa Lucia, after a fifteen kilometer walk, they were sent off again, this time by train: and they arrived in Verpoile.

The town seemed uninhabited. Spread out at the bottom of a small valley, the sun hit the white walls of the houses and vegetable gardens, and apart from a few rare noises in the deserted station, down along the village, and around, on the black and green sides of the mountains, there was nothing sign of life.

They went towards the center of Verpoile, a large square going uphill, also deserted; in the house, all peeling and punctured by machine gun bullets, where once there was the headquarters of the carabinieri, they found a Slavic guard, who, swearing and sweating, led them a little outside the town, into a building as large and unadorned as a workshop: it was the home of illegal immigrants.

In the evening they gave them nothing to eat, and made them sleep on the floor or on cots without a mattress. The following day, they ate something only at midday: and, in the evening, nothing but a little bread. They were dejected: Nini and the others, in their village, sometimes, during the nights of the festival, even devoured four loaves of bread with mortadella, at the end of the dance, towards morning. Now in Verpoile they were starving. They had gotten into the habit, fasting as they were, of walking up and down the town doing nothing; or lying with legs apart for hours on the side of the road or sidewalk. Sometimes they played cards: but with no pleasure, because their bellies were empty. One day they were taking a walk outside the village, silent and dejected; Eligio and Nini said a different blasphemy at each step and the others laughed when they heard them. Then a farmer

came forward from the village and headed towards them: he was a Slav, but he spoke Italian well.

“Would any of you like to work for me in the countryside?”

churches.

“What does it give us?” Germano asked in turn, harshly, with his hands in his pockets and a dark face: he wanted to make a good deal.

“Twenty dinars,” said the farmer, “and something to eat.” “I!”

shouted Nini: the others had been outpaced, and Nini followed the man, finally hoping for a good meal.

It was a wonderful morning: the shadowy hills were green with their round backs in the sun and the valley was full of light. Nini and the man first went home to get the scythes and rakes, then with the tools on their shoulders they set off.

Nini felt cheerful: he hadn't mowed for a long time, and although it was the most tiring work of a farmer, he almost felt nostalgic for it.

The lawn that needed to be worked, however, never appeared,

although they had been walking for almost an hour: finally after six or seven kilometres, there it was, immense, in the woods, full of thick, green alfalfa. There was little to mow: for no more than an hour; then they went further down to rake the hay. Meanwhile noon had come; the bell of a very distant country barely echoed its dim and festive tolls behind the hill. The prairies were immense and we never got to the end of them: Nini was so hungry that he had visions, yet he worked hard to rake to show the Slavic farmer how much the Italian boys were worth. One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock came: and, not even the shadow of dinner. Finally, the woman arrives on the cart with a shopping bag. The two men threw down their rakes and ran towards her, at the edge of the woods. Lunch consisted of soup with two potatoes.

Nini, who was almost on the verge of tears, after less than a minute had already finished swallowing the two spoonfuls of broth and the two potatoes, and with such fury that the farmer, looking at him smiling, said to him: «Eat, eat, boy, that the young They are hungry!" Then they resumed their work: there were still two hills to go, then they had to load the hay onto the cart. When about half past six or seven the wagon was loaded, the marshy ground gave way, the wheels sank into it and the frightened horses broke the drawbar. So they had to leave all the hay there because it was too late to reload it and they returned home: they arrived when it was already night with the farmer swearing in Italian, but cold and subdued, not like us; Nini, who didn't care at all about the hay because the man would be waiting for him for a long time the next day, thought of nothing but dinner. That little broth had just washed his empty stomach: but he hoped that dinner would be better, thinking that in those parts he used to do so; and meanwhile he was dying of hunger. Dinner, however, was like lunch: a bowl of polenta and milk. So Nini with twenty dinars in his pocket returned to his companions who were waiting for him; and while he went to bed

with a lighter stomach than other evenings, Eligio laughed and teased him: "Eat, eat boy!" But the next day they began to work for the Slavs: the Verpoile school blown up by the Germans had to be rebuilt.

They worked for a fortnight, for free, and almost without eating. On 2 July they were called to the Command, where they were ordered to make a diary of their lives from '43 to '47; the next day Nini, Eligio, Germano and Basilio were allowed to leave. Accompanied by a Slavic policeman, first by bus and then by train, they arrived in Rijeka.

4

The sea, the night in which they had arrived in Fiume - and had wandered around dead of hunger and tiredness for more than three hours looking for the torpedo factory, where they had to work - had seemed to them like an immense flow of pitch, cold, dark, light of the lightning that made the coasts of Dalmatia red. Scary. Other than the sea of Caorle: the one they had seen for the first time in their lives, as soon as the war ended, when they had gone on a trip, with the «Garibaldine avant-garde», and with Pieri Susanna in the lead, still all full of hopes that he shouted: "Boys, let's start a

revolution!" A beautiful sea, completely calm and blue, where companies of farmers were having breakfast, filling the little beach with yellow papers and empty flasks. And Milio playing the accordion. And Eligio who sang like crazy. And the Nini who scratched his belly...

After they had been in Fiume for a fortnight and had been taken into the torpedo factory, however, things began to go a little better. Nini and his other companions began to get used to the city and the sea. They worked in the factory until three in the afternoon, then they were free; so to spend the rest of the afternoon a little more cheerfully, Basilio one day had the idea of going to the beach. «Who knows how much it costs!» said Germanus. «Don't you remember Caorle?» Nini said,

«Whoever wanted to pay for the establishment or the huts, whoever didn't want to go and undress on the free beach.» So they went along the beach, looking for a place to swim without paying.

By now the sea for them was the same as in Caorle, except that, in the background, they could clearly see the mountains of Dalmatia and of the islands: and it was always calm, under a splendid sun.

They walked for a long time along the seafront, and finally arrived at a point where the beach narrowed, became wild, almost black and full of rocks. There were many boys from Fiume, Slovenians and Italians, who had camped there, deafening the air and water with their cries. "Shall we sit here?" Eligio said. "There's too much noise," said Germano, "let's go a bit

further on." "I'll stop here," said Nini. He jumped into the sand between the bushes, and within a minute he was in his underwear. While the others were undressing he went to start a conversation with a boy from Fiume. «How much do you pay to go to an establishment?» he asked him: the boy said a sum in dinars, and Nini, having done the calculation, discovered that it was around fifty lire. He went to tell Germano. "Tomorrow we're going to the factory," he concluded happily.

The man from Rijeka had approached: "Where are you from?" he asked.

"Friulians," said Nini gallantly. «In Italy», he added, «we could no longer live with that dog government. Long live Tito, by the Madonna!» The boy from Fiume fell silent, laughing. "Tell me,"

Nini continued, "are there any beautiful young ladies in the factories?" "There are certain f..." said the other. «Ah guys», Nini shouted to his companions, «I want to have fun. Who can stay tomorrow without going to get to know the beautiful rivers?" So the next day they went to the factory. The beautiful rivers were there, and they were indeed beautiful; girls like Nini and the others they had never seen, blondes, with long, straight hair on their shoulders, or gathered inside rubber caps, with certain long legs, tapered and clear as marble, and certain little costumes made of white and red wool. , blue, tight around the thighs, tense on the edge of the slightly swollen belly, full of virginity and love.

Nini was all eyes, and had lost his speech; and so do the others. They, the beautiful Fiumans, didn't even notice them, chatting together with their companions and the

their friends, with a frank and easy manner; or playing ball, or reading under the umbrellas, all shining with oil. It seemed that they were completely happy, that they didn't need anything, that you couldn't even touch them. Nini and the others were lying silently on the sand.

A group of girls passed by them, screaming like a flock of birds. They ran towards the surf and threw themselves into the sea.

"Let's go!" Nini then said. In agreement, the others stood up and followed the girls. They lingered in the middle of the waves which that day were swollen and higher than usual, and they let themselves be rocked by them laughing. Nini approached one of them, and in Italian with his heavy Friulian pronunciation, he shouted cheerfully:

"Wait for me, miss, otherwise you'll drown." The girl gave him an expressionless look, then turned to her classmates and burst out laughing. "What does this mule want!" she shouted: and all together they threw themselves into the sea, beating the crawl perfectly, and moved away in the direction of the pier. Nini didn't trust himself to go where she didn't touch

herself, Eligio and Germano only knew how to swim, and Basilio didn't know how to swim at all. They remained near the shore to splash around in the waves for a while, then they returned to the beach in disgrace; but the canvas underwear, of which they were already so ashamed, now soaked as they were, remained glued to them, more ridiculous than ever. They rolled in the sand," and remained there for a while, laughing at their misfortunes. Then Nini said: "Shall we go for a walk?" So they ended up leaving where they were the day before, among the rocks.

Behind them the beach was full of shouts and games; around the villas and guesthouses, among the greenery and flowers, they seemed the very images of serenity and well-being: the sea seethed boundlessly, all full of sunshine up to the stupendous distant coasts tinged with blue. And while they walked towards the free beach, the beach of the kids and the poor people, everything around them, as if they weren't there, was in

party.

They found the boys from the day before again and the blond greeted Nini.

"How are you doing, Friulians," he said. "Good, comrade," replied the smiling Nini. "Yes, well," Eligio muttered, "with this Saint Anna beating." «Are the rivers beautiful?» the blond asked. "It's not bad," said Nini, as if they no longer had any secrets for him; but he wasn't as cheerful as usual.

He thought of other summers, of swimming in the Tagliamento. Every after lunch, as soon as they ate, they left Ligugnana, towards Rosa, where the arm of water of the Tagliamento, from the expanses of gravel and brambles, came to lap the right bank, fresh with sorghum, elderberries, poplars; and, behind the embankment, the vineyards where the grapes were turning grey; and the concrete boulders of the shelter where you can sunbathe. Boys from all the towns came to Rosa, Casarsa, San Giovanni, Gleris and San Vito, because that was the most beautiful place in the Tagliamento; the water, although green and deep, was so clear that you could see the shiny pebbles at the bottom.

They were all friends up there. Towards the evening they returned and stayed until dinner time in the square in Ligugnana, sitting on the grass or

on the steps to chat.

Now, looking around, my heart ached. The Nini went to lie down alone among the rocks. After a while, having left the boys from Fiume, the others also came to lie down next to him, dejected. «Ah madam, comrades!» sighed Nini.

"The girls here will be beautiful," said Basilio, "but I have ours better." "Having Onorina here, or Ines," said Eligio. «Or the Gem...» continued Basilio. «Or that p... of the Queen,»

added Nini, "do you remember that party when I accompanied her into her garden?" Germano, who had always been silent, suddenly began to hum, in an ever louder voice, one of their dearest songs from Ligugnana: «Perhaps the last love encounter, perhaps the last kiss will be... " The others

they followed him in chorus: Nini and Basilio were first, Eligio second, and Germano bass. On Sunday evenings, in the village, when they sang in the taverns, at Enal or Montenegro, everyone listened to them.

«Let's sing Friulian songs, dog world!» said Nini. AND

at the top of his lungs he began: «O se biel ciastel di Udin - o se biela zoventut...» (1) They sang with a lot of feeling, even though it was a happy little villa.

Then they sang a more nostalgic one, with all their hearts:

«Al ciente the yellow - al criche the day - goodbye little girls - let's go..."

(2) The boys from Fiume had gathered around them, and were now listening to them attentively. «And I sing, I sing, I sing,» Nini sang, «but I don't know why - and I only sing - that to console myself...» And then the great villotta, the traditional Friuli villotta: «Se tu vens cassù tas cretis - la che lor mi han soterat...» (3) By now they almost had a lump in their throats: those Sunday evening songs, now sung outdoors in full sun, in front of the sea, had a strange effect. But feeling listened to by the boys from Fiume, Nini and the others left their melancholy behind and started up the

cheerful little villas. Their voices resonated clearly in the light of the sun that was now declining over the deserted sea, among the cries of a few seagulls and the distant buzz of the beach. Eligio started: «I heard, I heard, I heard - my girlfriend - to do pss, to do pss, to do pss

- in the urinal.» Everyone was laughing by now.

In the following two or three days, Nini and the others gained some courage. Nini had luck with a girl from Porec who served in a hotel, and who introduced her companions to the others. Finally Eligio concluded: "Beautiful girls, yes, but too hungry." In fact, they had started the fight against hunger again: after the first two or three days the meals had gotten worse and worse: two spoonfuls of soup and a mouthful of hard, black meat, and even the bread had been counted. They got up from the canteen hungrier than before, and went to lie down on the sand

hatch their fast. Then after about twenty days, on the 28th

August, there was something new. At the canteen a manager told them that they needed passes to eat, starting that same evening.

“What tiles?” said Germanus.

"The cards," said the manager, "without cards you can't eat here." Al Nini felt like crying. «What weaving, what whores of weaving!» he said.

Germano turned to another Istrian worker who had been there at the torpedo factory for some time, and asked him what they should do.

So they immediately began the tour of the offices: half a dozen passed by, in the factories and outside. Nobody knew anything, everyone had other things to do: in the evening they skipped dinner.

The next morning they got up early to go to the town hall. There they got kicked out of another row of offices; the morning heat pressed on his empty stomach. "I'm dreaming,"

said Nini, in a cold sweat.

Those were the days when the Cominform had put Yugoslavia on trial. All confusion reigned in the city, from factories to offices, from shops to squares. There was the frightened air of a city in a state of alarm.

The boys slowly moved away from the town hall, in the direction of a small hill, whose parched greenery shone among the walls of the houses and buildings, at the end of a square.

They reached the hill and went to lie down on the benches in the garden.

And now?, everyone thought in silence, where would they go and hit their heads? Just as they had skipped dinner the night before, so today they would have skipped lunch, and then dinner again...

"Here we are dying of hunger," said Eligio. Nini and the others were silent.

«Here we die of hunger, because everything is registered,»

Eligio insisted. "Something must be done if we don't want to die." "And what?" said Germanus.

"Let's go steal," said Nini.

"Yes, with these dogs," said Germano.

"Disgusting Slavs, all right," said Nini and spat on the ground. At that moment a girl was seen passing at the end of a driveway.

"Hey, blonde!" Nini shouted.

The blonde went straight away about her business, calmly.

"Miss, miss!" Nini shouted again.

«And stop it!» Germano grumbled. Nini jumped to sit on the bench where he was lying. "No," he said crossly,

«no, I want to ask you for information.» He reached her. He took on a serious and gallant air. "Excuse me, miss," she said, "we are foreigners, we

would need a favor..." The girl looked at him, and she was reassured by her dark, candid and almost naive expression. "If I may..." she said. Nini, happy, turned towards the others and called them. The others came and formed a circle, a little shyly, around the girl. «Well,» said Nini, «we've been going around the offices for two days to get our membership cards done and we haven't succeeded. Without the cards we can't eat, so we've been fasting since yesterday at noon... Can't you give me some advice?" "Do you work in any factories?" the girl asked. "Yes, at the torpedo factory." «And aren't you from here, I mean aren't you from Istria?» "We're from Italy," Nini said.

"Then we need to go to the town hall," said the girl.

"We've been there," Nini exclaimed, "but nobody knows anything." "AND" because you have to go to a special office. Well come on,' she added after being a little undecided, "I'll take you there."

"Oh thank you, thank you," cried Nini with gallant gratitude.

They went down the hill, towards the town hall, and on the street they chatted "Where are you from?" the girl asked. "We are from Ligugnana, near Udine," they replied, then, each speaking a little, they told the girl their whole adventure.

They arrived at the town hall with an almost light heart.

The girl led them through a courtyard and two or three corridors.

"Here," he said in front of a broken door, "he's back there," and he greeted them while looking at Nini. The office was exactly that, but there was a very long queue of people in front of the counter.

The air was hot, there was a smell of dirty rags and sweat.

They had arrived too late, and now there was nothing left to do for lunch.

The office closed at one. "We'll be back tomorrow," said Germano.

And they went out, wandering around the sun-baked city again, looking for something to eat. They entered various shops, but without a card there was nothing, not even to die.

By now they could no longer stand the heat and hunger: so they decided to buy, at a very high price, a jar of jam, the only kind that was not registered. With that under their arm, they went to their room. After half a minute the vase was completely clean.

With the sweetness of the jam inside their empty stomachs they lay down in bed. They were all silent: through the shutters the hot sun broke into the room: with its buzzing, stagnant noises, and the breath of the sea, thunderous but muffled by the distance, which made the silence thicker.

But no one slept, even if they didn't have the desire or courage to talk. They were silent, sweaty, each hungry for him.

Suddenly it was Basilio who broke the silence.

"Guys, I'm going home," he said. The others said nothing.

"Here we suffer too much hunger," Basilio continued.

"Yes, let's get out of here," said Eligio, who was feeling unwell in those days, almost crying in his throat. He hadn't sat up on the bed, like Basilio, but remained lying there, with his face against the covers.

"Hey, comrades," said Nini, "what do you have?" "We have plenty of balls," said Basilio.

"And what do you want to do?" Germano muttered.

"Let's go," said Basilio. "I'm leaving." Eligio jumped up.

"I won't stay here a day longer," he shouted. He had managed to overcome the emotion that had previously tightened his throat, he reasoned more frankly now, but he now seemed fixed in his idea of him. Nini and

Germano, on the other hand, continued to remain silent, lying on their beds, and for a few minutes silence and sultriness returned to the room.

«I'm leaving, you understand», Eligio began again, «I don't want to die of hunger. Do you hope that we will have the cards tomorrow? If we really want to delude ourselves, they will perhaps give them to us in three or four days. And in the meantime, will we live on jam? And the money? And then when we have the cards, with the food they give us at the torpedo factory we will still die of hunger little by little. At home, a plate of beans and polenta are safe, even if you don't work. No, a bit of beans and polenta and a slice of salami, at home, are never missing, never missing.» "In Italy we won't work," continued Basilio, "but at least, they say in Italy, we won't die of hunger. We've had some bad times at home, but we never even dreamed of hunger like this. I, comrades, on my own, am leaving. You and I are leaving, Eligio." Germano said: «Let's try to hold out for a few more days. Maybe after we have the cards, they will feed us a little better." Eligio responded violently, again almost crying: «You stay there, you stay there. We've been holding out for a month and a half now, and it's gotten worse and worse, damn it. Enough, I'm coming back." «Good job», said Nini, «and how do you cross the border? We made it, but how? by chance. If it was because of that man, at this time we were still on the Collio, eating roots. Do you hope it goes well again? And then as long as the Italians took us, well we were in the family, but if these sons of dogs catch you, who knows what they are capable of doing to you.» "They'll kill you," said Germano.

"Communism will be beautiful," said Nini, "I now have this idea, and I will have it until I die, but these dogs..." "Say what you want," interrupted Eligio, "I also risk the foiba, but starvation is the worst death there is. And then in any case you get a shot in the back, while crossing the border, and amen." "Coming," repeated Germano, "was easy, but coming back..." "It seems like a century since I've seen Italy," Nini said in a hoarse voice.

"It's far away, it's far away," said Germano.

"What a fuss," exclaimed Basilio, "if you take the train and in one night you're in Gorizia." "Okay," Nini suddenly shouted,

"I'm in. I'm leaving too." And she stood up as if the train was ready outside the door.

«And you Germanus?» Eligio asked.

"Do you want me to stay here alone?" said Germanus. «If you three go back to Italy, I'll go back too.» That same night, at half past one they took the train to Gorizia.

In the afternoon they had packed their bags and bought themselves some jam and some bread. It was an old Italian train, with signs of bombing, all chipped and without glass.

They found a third-class compartment all for themselves and took refuge there; Eligio and Nini lay down on the seats, Germano and Basilio on the floor. But they couldn't fall asleep.

The train ran huffing, gasping, shaking, in continuous curves between the Istrian mountains glued to the moonless night like ghosts. The river and the sea disappeared behind, as if swallowed by an unreal light. And through those lands that were neither Italian nor Slavic, it seemed that the train was running without any destination, solely directed towards the darkness of the night.

"Goodbye Fiume," Nini said with his hands crossed under his head.

«Goodbye Tito!»

Despite the uncertainty of the future, towards dawn, Italy was there:

and Yugoslavia was slowly being lost, left behind with its hunger and its misery.

"When we make the revolution," said Germano, "things won't go like here." "Ah," exclaimed Nini, "and in the meantime let's go and eat De Gasperi's beans." "Oilè, oilè, oilè," Basilio sighed, "and you don't make a fuss about De Gasperi..." "Eh, Milio did well," Nini said, almost to himself, with his eyes on the black ceiling of the carriage. «Milio did well in making the

papers to go to Switzerland!...» The train stopped abruptly after giving two or three piercing whistles which had splintered in the void of a little valley. Nini went to the window and saw a station: on the ridge of a hill he could glimpse a milky row of houses. "A country," he said.

The doors slammed, there was a great clatter of footsteps, shouts, calls, knocks. The train seemed to be emptying. "What happens?" Eligio said. The Nini opened the door and stepped onto the tracks. "Everyone's getting out," he shouted.

They hastily took their bundles and got out too.

The whole crowd had crowded onto the platform, shouting and agitating.

It was still pitch dark, it couldn't have even been three o'clock. Nini and the others went to stand in the middle of the crowd, which was almost all refugees. The train to Gorizia was supposed to arrive after half an hour. The boys waited sitting on their bundles.

The new train was packed; the crowd attacked him furiously, struggling in the darkness. Some stood on the steps holding on to the handles, others sat on the buffers, and some climbed up to the roof. The children and women who remained on the ground were screaming. More than half the people had not managed to get on, and were running up and down the tracks and platforms, in indescribable confusion. Suddenly Nini realized that he was left alone.

He began to look around, at the people, but at his own

comrades could not be seen. Then he began to walk up and down the train shouting: "Eligio, Germano!" His voice couldn't even be heard, it was chaos in the middle of the tracks.

Five minutes, ten, a quarter of an hour passed: by now whoever was inside was inside and people no longer even tried to hold on to the doors, but shouted and protested.

The desperate Nini continued to go back and forth, searching and shouting almost without realizing it: "Eligio, Germano!"

«They attack

and

other

wagon,"

The

these

suddenly Germano's voice from behind. «Ah you're here,»

Nini shouted happily, "and the others?" "I don't know," cried Germano.

They ran towards the tail of the train.

In fact, they were attacking a new wagon, and they were among the first to get into it. There they also found Eligio.

Basilio, on the other hand, was lost.

They traveled the rest of the night. Until dawn whitened over Istria. The light reached the bare peaks of the mountains, the sun was born, warm and round, and from the horizon the train was invaded by a lime glow. Nini reopened his eyes in the midst of the carnage that crowded the compartments and corridors. "Boys!"

called; the others woke up, yawning, and shortly after the train stopped.

It was an isolated little station. Almost everyone got off there. The boys looked around not knowing what to do. Among those coming down there was a thirteen-year-old boy, and Nini turned to him.

“Are we close to the border here?” she whispered to him. "Yes," said the boy. "Let's get out," Nini shouted. The others were uncertain. "Come on, let's go down," Nini repeated, and grabbing his bundle he went after the boy. The others followed him. On the platform Nini resumed conversation with the boy who was alone. "Say," he said,

“How do you get close to the border?” «Today is difficult», replied the boy, «it's a holiday. There are no means.” «Then... we'd better get back on the train.» "No, he doesn't go to Gorizia," said the

lad. «And how can we get to Gorizia?» «Today is a holiday, there are no transports.» “What can be done then?” «You can walk to the other station, and wait there for the train to Gorizia. I'll accompany you if you want.” "Oh thank you," said Nini.

"Good boy!" Nini took his arm, and leaving the station together, they turned before entering the town along a dusty road, which disappeared along the side of the hill all made of stone and without a shadow under the burning sun. In just over an hour they arrived at the new station, but the train would not pass until midday. They threw themselves down to sleep in a grassy area near the station. Then they left and towards evening they arrived in Gorizia.

They went down under the shelters in the midst of a crowd of policemen.

But the confusion of the refugees, with the women screaming and the children crying, was so great that they got lost in the midst of it.

"Come on guys," Germano said softly.

"Lord, give us this grace," said Nini. They went out together with the line of refugees without anyone saying anything.

They were free, in Italy. Swallows flew in the station square, people chatted, you could smell the scent of wet earth and fireplaces. Nini felt like he was in Ligugnana, at the time when the farmers return from the field on the hay wagon, and the kitchens are full of people, some talking, some arguing, some singing, while the little ones bring the animals to drink from

the tub of the pump, and the girls do their hair, preparing to take the milk to the dairy; the town square comes alive, it almost takes on a festive air, with the good smell of polenta in the warm evening air, and the first lights starting to come on here and there. There, in the village of the station, the small stone houses, with the courtyards and the stables, the mulberry trees, the vineyards, the edges of the country road, were exactly the same as those of Ligugnana or San Giovanni, even if, around, the mountains were closer. Even the dialect of the people was almost the same. And far behind the last houses, behind the

expanse of the city, the course of the Isonzo could be distinguished, between the mountains and the plain, the Isonzo with its gravel bed and its canals of blue and transparent water, so similar to those of the Tagliamento.

"We're at home, guys," Nini said cheerfully, breathing deeply the air of the Friulian villages.

"Let's go and have a drink," said Basilio.

"Two too," Nini shouted.

"Go slowly, guys," said Germano, "we're not sure it's going well yet." They entered a tavern: but as soon as they entered they realized that there was a police station: they had just enough time to leave before someone stopped them.

They cut down a secondary road, jumped a ditch and went into the middle of a corn field: they wanted to eat what little bread and jam they had left before continuing. They stayed for half an hour inside the hiding place of the cobs, on the fresh turf. Then they went out and started walking down the street, towards the city.

But around a bend, unexpectedly, they saw a patrol of police coming towards them. They could neither retrace their steps nor throw themselves into the fields beyond the ditch. They were stopped and immediately taken to headquarters, from where they went to Gorizia prison. They remained in prison for a long time: they would return to their home only at the end of September.

NOTE:

(1) Oh what a beautiful castle in Udine - oh what a beautiful youth...

(2) The rooster crows - the day is breaking - goodbye child -

I have to leave.

(3) If you come up here among the cliffs - where I am buried.

5

«We arrived in Switzerland at night», Milio began to tell his companions, «and the Brig station was all lit up; you could see behind the town with the mountains that surrounded it, beautiful, high, and full of little lights.

«I stopped in Brig until the morning, and I immediately called my partner Lina in Fribourg to tell her to wait for me because I was leaving Brig in less than half an hour. At noon I arrived in Fribourg. I got off the train and went out of the station looking for that young lady because we had agreed that she would come to accompany me to Salvenach, where I had to go. After I had waited for a long time, I saw her coming towards me, she and her sister Catina; we hugged each other affectionately like good friends, and immediately went to their house.

«There they offered me some sweets and beer: they asked me how their family and all of Rosa's relatives were doing. But it was already late, five in the afternoon; and, as agreed, Lina came to accompany me to the town where I had to go to work, which was not far from Fribourg.

«We got off at a station called Cressier, from where we had to walk a kilometre. But Salvenach could already be seen from up there. We set off along a beautiful asphalt road, all surrounded by fruit trees. After all, we see a beautiful house, all well plastered, and I say to the young lady: I wish it was the one I have to go to!

«We arrived in the plaza maiòr of the town, there we found an old man and we asked him: «Where is Walter Berninger's house?» And he kindly said to

us: «The first house a

right." Then we went back, as he had indicated: it was the very house we had seen before! I was completely happy; it was so beautiful, up there, just a gentleman's house...

But there was no one there, just a big dog. I stayed still, because it scared me a little; but my friend was waiting for Mr. Berninger, walking up and down the garden, without paying him any attention.

«Suddenly we saw a man of about fifty and the young lady asked him in French if he was Walter Berninger: and indeed he was. He let us both into the house, he offered us food, drink and smoke. A welcome you can't even imagine. After a while I went to accompany the girl and thanked her very much for the trouble ... And now it was time for dinner: the master called me into the kitchen and I saw the table already set. I was immediately demoralized when I saw the table without the tablecloth and a broth that looked like pumpkin soup, and coffee and milk without salt and sugar.

That was eating. The owner saw that I was quite serious, and to give me some courage he sent for two other Italians who had already been living in Salvenach for a year. We talked about many things; they encouraged me and told me: "A little at a time you'll get used to it, go there." «I didn't get along very well with my boss because he didn't want to give me the salary he had agreed upon: but I was respected by the whole town, because I was a good worker. But I didn't understand many things well... why, after I had done my duty, were they so rude and harsh with me? The people there are not like where we are...

One evening, however, I had the opportunity to talk to a certain Miss Leich, who lived in the town where I worked. She was of German origin, but she had studied and been to Italy several times, and she loved Italians; she spoke Italian and many other languages.

She very kindly gave me many explanations about my master, because she knew him; he owned a lot of countryside

but all mortgaged, in the hands of the Government, and so, not being able to pay me off every month, he looked serious and dark-faced.

«So things got worse day by day with continuous sorrows; even the village was sorry that I had ended up in such a messy family. By now, I was determined that I would return at Christmas; but time never passed for me. On November 3rd there was a huge fair in Morat, which was traditional for the Swiss. The owners had all gone, and so I was left alone at home.

«After lunch I went to graze with the cows in a meadow near which the railway line passed. I was calmly watching over the animals, when shortly afterwards I saw a beautiful blonde girl coming from behind the railway embankment, also with the animals. I already knew her: she was from Cressier, the town next to mine.

I went to meet her and we had a nice chat sitting near the tracks.

«She also knew me by sight. But she was quite serious reading a book, while I waited... Suddenly I asked the beautiful Germane: "What are you reading?" «And she kindly answered me: «The two little orphans». It already seemed like we were in love with each other. So I asked the young lady my question, as best I could manage, in French:

«Germane, je vous aime!» And she received my words affectionately. We parted ways by agreement: afterwards, in the evenings of freedom, I often practiced it and we went dancing or to the cinema, like good boyfriends.

«One day, my master said to me: «The next festival in Libistorf is a big event, you go there because it is interesting, especially for you who are Italian.» «So six or seven Italians got together, and on the day of the celebration we left for Libistorf. It was five kilometers away from Salvenach, and it was one of the villages I had never been to.

On the streets we always walked close to the coast of a

forest, and on the other you could see the green valley. Suddenly we arrived in Libistorf, which was very small but made up entirely of beautiful buildings, even though the inhabitants were farmers. I liked the country a

lot, because it was rich and also different from the others: it had small lakes around it on one side and beautiful pine and fir trees on the other.

«When we arrived in the center of the town, we were anxiously awaiting the celebration, which was not yet prepared. So, in the meantime, we Italians sat on the edge of the ditch to eat some fruit and said to ourselves: "It's nice here because the procession has to pass right in front of us."

«Then, after an hour the procession began to make its first lap around the town. At the head was one with a tambourine who was playing and walking backwards, looking at the whole company; the tambourine was played to make two of the most beautiful horses in the country dance, with two jockeys dressed in an ancient military uniform in the saddle; behind it a large pine tree twenty-five meters long and very thick with branches pulled by eight well-equipped horses. In the middle of this pine tree there was standing a boy all dressed in little pine twigs, who preached continuously, but we did not understand him because he spoke in German: it only seemed that he was saying some antics to make people laugh. Behind it came a wedding between a beautiful girl dressed in white and a young man all in black.

Then a large company singing, and behind it a cart with four poorly dressed boys who were planting pine trees, and another with some young ladies, also poorly dressed, who were threshing the wheat, one for each corner of the cart. Then came some young people with racing bicycles all covered in papers of various colours: behind them you could see a van loaded with bins, and a herd of cows, the most beautiful in the country, selected, each with a bell hanging around its neck. down to the ground; and finally two hunters dressed as they once were with a musket on their shoulders and a dog each, white and small.

«In the village there was a huge crowd, with the girls dressed

wearing peasant costume and holding small flags. Shots could be continuously heard from the shooting ranges, and in the middle of the square, among the great confusion, there was a man on a stand with a hoop in his hand: in the middle of the hoop were a liter of white wine and two glasses, one on each side, and he turned them very hard without making them fall; and meanwhile he preached in German to keep the people happy.

Finally, towards the evening, there was a big dance party, in a beautiful room, you had to see.

«Farmers in Switzerland are very different than here.

They have better possibilities, because they are almost never large families, like ours, and therefore they can sell almost all their harvest. They have much nicer houses than ours; and what stables! They look like models. And then everyone in their home has a radio, a telephone. But the big difference with us is in eating: we, despite being poorer, eat like the richest of them.

It seems to me that they are tougher people and have much less humanity than us: even if they go to school until they are sixteen, they are less intelligent, and then they have avarice in their blood.

Unlucky are those who find themselves working under them! Because they are people who don't have much consideration either for themselves or for others.

They always work without ever getting tired, perhaps even in the rain, and in the summer under the full sun after lunch. There is no one over fifty who doesn't have arthritic pain, and they think it's not from work! In the evening, after having worked tirelessly, they don't go to have a chat on the street like us; they always remain solitary in their homes. But this, however, was fine for us Italians, who were thus observed less when we went for a walk with the beautiful blondes.

«My master was a guy who had no life experience, and let his interests go to ruin. He was very spoiled, he liked to eat well, and even drink and smoke without it

do nothing. His only occupation was his wife. He was much criticized in the country because he didn't work, and what's more he had big debts; so what he possessed of him was only apparently his, while in truth he was already under other masters. He had a farm of forty stands of land, and fifteen animals in the stable, and everything went on only through the work of two farm boys: me and my partner Ernst Gubler, who was Swiss, but lived in the north, in the city of Alten. My master was German, and in Salvenach

everyone spoke his language, German. He married at the age of twenty and had four children, who were called Peter, Cartli, Hans and Anna Mari. They were all Protestants in the family: but despite being Protestants they followed religion a lot: every Sunday they had to travel four kilometers to go to mass, because there wasn't their church in Salvenach.

«Fortunately my partner loved me: in fact the master was often sad because things were going wrong for him, and then he took revenge on us journeymen. But there was nothing to be done, because Ernst, who spoke his language, showed him without fear that he was in the wrong and so I was saved too. Mr. Berninger was always a reserved man and gave little confidence. In Salvenach there were four Berninger families who were related to each other: they were the oldest in the village and they were very well off. My master's misfortune was that he had lost his father, who was a deputy, too young and, due to his inexperience, he had not been able to manage his property well, which was now in ruins.

«Salvenach must have had about five hundred inhabitants. As soon as you got off the Cressier station you could see it all on the ridge of the hill.

«In Switzerland almost all villages are built on the tops of the hilly terrain. But, for me, Salvenach was the most beautiful.

«From Cressier you could see its little white houses, and, behind,

the mountain slope all full of pine trees and villas. It was located along the provincial road eight kilometers from Friborg and three from Lake Morat. The other villages that I knew, however, were far from the road, in the open countryside. Seeing Salvenach appear at the end of the street, with its stretch of beautiful houses, you would have thought it had much more than five hundred inhabitants.

«Going towards Friborg from Salvenach life looked very different than going towards Morat. On the Friborg side you could only see green countryside, and to the right and left, along the road, you could come across several villages: Cormond, Iois and many others. Instead, towards Morat it was enough to get on the bicycle, and there was no need to pedal to the town square.

«From that side the view was very beautiful: you could see small groves in which winding paths led, all full of white and shiny gravel, and here and there on the edge of the forest, green wooden benches, where, in summer , the Swiss who went for a walk with their backpack on their shoulders took a rest, but especially the lovers.

«The countryside where I worked stretched around the town for a square kilometre, on both sides of the provincial road, and pushed towards the other villages, surrounded, always on the plain, by a large forest.

«What a beautiful city, Freiburg! I would never have imagined such beauty. As soon as I entered the city for the first time, I felt full of joy in seeing those wide squares, those streets so clean: and hotels, pastry shops, shop windows in abundance... The buildings were not as tall as those in our cities, but they had beautiful frames, painted with flower ornaments and embroidery, as is the traditional Swiss custom. In Freiburg I found a sporty and beautiful youth: the young ladies were rather tall, slender, with long, wavy and blond hair. The holidays were spent in groups on the banks of their lakes. One day I was invited to play in Friborg by my mistress's friends, and that time I understood how much the

Switzerland is traditional. The girls had jambon, which is pork, to eat for a snack and they wore Friborg fashion clothes: long, black and tight; the shoes were black and the socks white; then they had a brown apron, all embroidered from shoulders to hips; two golden chains hung from the sides and on their heads they wore a beautiful cap tightened by a crest made entirely of veil.

«Girls in Switzerland are much more advanced than here. And my little mistress... Ah, I will always remember her...

«One after lunch I had to go to Cressier to pick up two large suitcases at the station, because Peter, who was a student in Lausanne, had arrived. So with these two heavy suitcases I had to make the journey from the station to the town; and there was quite a climb to do, because Salvenach was one of the highest villages. When I was halfway there I stopped to rest and smoke a half cigarette. Suddenly I saw at the end, near the station, three or four girls heading towards the town. I waited for them, thinking, "Maybe I know

them, so they'll help me carry the weight of these suitcases." «They came close, and it was just as I thought: I had known all three of them since the day I was in Freiburg. Without me asking them, they took the suitcases and asked me: "How are you doing, where are you working?" "In Salvenach," I replied, "at Berninger's." "You look good in it," the girls then said, laughing,

"because there is a beautiful young lady there..." "Don't joke," I said,

"She's my mistress." «But from that time I began to think about Anna Mari, my mistress, whereas before those three girls told me about it it had never even crossed my mind. The Berninger family where I worked was made up of father, mother and four brothers, three boys and one woman, Anna Mari. The farm belonged to her father, but he had given it to her son Cartli to work on. Hans worked far from the village, in a forest; instead Peter was a scholar, he knew Italian, and came home from school every fortnight. Hans instead every two hours

three months. Anna Mari did the housework and, when there was a lot of work in the countryside, she came to help us too.

«One fine evening on the first of the month Peter was at home on leave; I started playing the accordion in my room; suddenly I saw Anna Mari, Peter and the son of the town teacher, Armando, enter. They organized a little party without much thought: they each began to dance a little with Anna Mari; then they went to get some sparkling wine, chocolate and other sweets. So, after a couple of hours, we were all a little cheerful.

But the moment came when we had to dissolve the company: in fact Peter had to go to town. But my other friend Armando and I remained in the room for more than an hour, chatting. My friend Anna Mari had already practiced it, and she made me understand by winking at me. He helped me to please me as much as she did; and while he looked out the window at the beautiful starry evening, I said to her softly: "Trè jolì, trè jolì", and I kissed her.

«Anna Mari was a blonde girl, a little fat, not very tall but white-faced, with a beautiful white and smooth complexion. Her hair was combed back,

falling in waves around her neck. That evening she had a nice white wool sweater. She had been telling me for a long time: "You are very kind." And I, inside myself, admired her, but I didn't let her family understand me, because I knew they would be jealous. The young lady found me kind because she heard me speaking to everyone in the same way: and I always tried to make myself nice, so that everyone up there would love me.

«I hadn't understood Anna Marì before; she was, among her girls, one of those who showed me the most sympathy, but I didn't want to think about it and I didn't even understand what she thought of me.

«But once there had been some issues between us, so we had almost quarreled and we hadn't gotten along anymore;

in fact, from that time on we hardly spoke to each other anymore. For the first question, the dancing had been to blame: once at a party in Salvenach an Italian called Olivieri had asked her to go for a ride with him, and she had replied that she didn't dance with Italians because her father, the Italians, he didn't love them.

«Hearing these words, given that I was an Italian and was working for his father, I was disheartened. And the next day I told his brother Cartli everything; and to tell the truth, I told him almost crying, because I felt very offended and dejected. «Why did Anna Marì behave this way?»

I asked him. "Maybe I'm more civilized than you Swiss people think," I said to Cartli, "and women think we're all scoundrels, but that's not true, and maybe we're more honest than you Swiss people." «« Ah, friend, » Cartli replied, « don't go after Anna Marì, because she is a child, believe me, she is a child, she is a child. » «Cartli was the brother with whom Anna Marì didn't get along; for her there was only Peter. The second issue that she and I had was because Anna Marì got even more angry because of her sister-in-law, who loved me too much. Cartli's wife was called Cecilia, she was still young and I had really taken a liking to her: every time she went shopping down at the shop she brought me sweets. I've never understood her very well either; but she behaved in a very strange way towards me, and was a fool to bring me home every time some little present.

Anna Marì was jealous because she was in love with me; and she went out into town to tell Armando and the other young men that I was happy in Cartli's house because I got along with Cecilia.

«So, knowing about this talk, I went to complain to her and told her that she had behaved badly. So from that time Anna Marì no longer told me that I was kind. And I made sure to do my job as best I could without paying attention to her and trying to make everyone else love me.

«The evening we had that party we spoke to each other for the first time in many weeks.

Then came the moment when Armando said he had to go home; so slowly, already in agreement, we went out of the kitchen so that our brother wouldn't hear us.

As soon as we were outside our friend Armando said good night, but Anna Marì still didn't want to go to sleep, and said that it seemed to her that that was the most beautiful evening of her life because she was with a young Italian foreigner who he kissed her. She took me out through the stable, and we went for a walk in the fields. The beautiful blonde was very attractive, but at the same time I felt uncertain, because I was thinking about so many things; I said to her: «What if your brothers found us? what would become of me?» «But she didn't worry about it; and I didn't know what to do because feeling that girl in her arms made me want to make love too much. However, she encouraged me a little by telling me that her brother Cartli, who was sleeping with her, wouldn't worry about her and if Peter had seen us he wouldn't have told us anything about her because he understood our youth.

«Walking slowly we found a nice place, where we sat down to rest, with the two hearts in love next to each other.

«The house where I was working was one of the last in Salvenach, which, like all Swiss villages, was located on the top of a hill, and the countryside stretched out below.

From the door of the Berninger house you could see the other houses in the village, the hill and all the woods around the fields under your feet.

«Anna Mari and I, having left the courtyard, went down the town, crossed the railway and reached the first pine trees. And there in the shadows we had found our nook.

«I put my hands everywhere, but not too low, because I was afraid of making mistakes and offending her. But not

I did well, though, and all my classmates told me afterwards that she wanted it and I could do whatever I wanted with her. We just kissed and said all those things that good lovers say to each other.

"I don't eat at home," said Anna Mari, "I don't go to eat in Fribourg." "I found a post to tell you," I said, "here I speak... If you're looking for nicer work, I'll work with you... I'll work with you... after we get married, and after we will always be very happy... walk, me with you...

dance... and then we'd have some boys..." "Yes, yes, I'll do my best," said Anna Mari.

«"But don't let your parents see you as being so kind to me," I recommended to her with all my heart. And in fact I had observed that when we were together her father and mother would observe us and would listen carefully to hear what we were saying. But the day I spoke to Cartli about dancing, I also pointed out dad Walter's way of doing things. "Mr. Berninger doesn't need to make so many observations," I told him, "if Anna Mari and I talk so often together it's because just as I want to hear French words, perhaps she wants to hear Italian ones. We Italians are not like you think." «And Cartli had told her father Walter and her mother Adelaide everything about her. Then one day the owner sent me to buy two bottles of beer; when I returned to bring them to him I went up to his room. "You come,"

he said to me, "let's drink beer together." I understood that she wanted to tell me something, certainly regarding what I had said to Cartli about Anna Mari. We went to her room which was all well furnished, full of shiny and

luxurious furniture. There we drank beer and also ate some biscuits. He then took me to see the other room too, where all her memories were; on the wall hung two or three diplomas, and in a little glass box a gold medal, which she had earned because for forty years in a row she had been part of a school of

singers.

«"Ah," I said to him, "a quarter of everything in here would be enough for me to get married." «"Come on, drink, friend," the owner said to me.

«"And Mrs. Adelaide?" I asked.

«The old man went down to call her, so the three of us continued chatting together. They were very polite and I understood that they wanted to tell me something. When we drank the beer we looked each other in the eyes, because that's how they use it there: and luckily I knew it, otherwise I would have looked rude. I knew this because I was a good friend of Armando, and one evening we had gone drinking, together with a group of friends.

We drank the beer and while we drank I looked around. Then a boy approached me and asked me if I was angry with him. "No," I said: and another Italian who was among us warned me that the Swiss used to look each other in the eyes while drinking. So that night with old Walter I knew of that habit, and while I drank I looked at him; he too looked at me smiling; and also mother Adelaide.

We didn't say anything to each other about Anna Mari and the chatter at the ball: but I understood that this was what the two old men wanted to talk to me about. So without saying a word to each other we forgave and pitied each other.

«This is why I was now very afraid that Anna Mari would make her parents guess that she had been in the woods with me.

«It was about a kilometer from the corner where we were hiding to our house, but that kilometer was as long as ten for someone who had to walk it

alone, because it was all uphill.

We made our way slowly embracing each other, and we didn't think about evil, about our conditions, about misery, but we only thought about how beautiful love was. In the end, however, our walk under the stars and the moon that illuminated us,

it had tired us a little: and so the last part of the climb was as tiring as if that hill had been a mountain. The early hours of Monday were already approaching: the time had come to leave us; the separation was very long, and Anna Mari, before saying goodnight to me, gave me twenty or thirty little kisses against her lips. From that time we went back to speaking kindly to each other about many things, but not very often, and no longer about love.

«In the evening I almost always felt very melancholy. I remembered Rosa that at that time she was so beautiful and full of life: everyone was tired from working in the countryside, but at the same time there was so much joy around. The younger brothers loaded the milk can onto the handlebars of the bicycle and set off pedaling happily and whistling towards the town square. Along the main road, summer or winter, there was always a coming and going of carts or wagons or bicycles, going from Rosa to Gruaro; and the women, lighting the fire or picking up the clothes left to dry in the courtyard, talked to each other, shouting and laughing. Those hours were beautiful: we young men washed ourselves at the pump while the old men or the kids took the animals to water, and then we went to change because towards the evening, in our villages, there is always a bit

of celebration.

«In Switzerland, however, at that time, it was immediately dark and cold, and everyone retreated to their beautiful homes.

«I remember that one of those evenings the owner said to me:

«Gabli can no longer come to us to work, and so now you will go with the dogs to the dairy to bring milk.» I had to say yes, but I was very disheartened by that assignment. I didn't know how to put all those little

harnesses on the two dogs. I wasn't used to it, and I was ashamed to do that job: I didn't know what to feed them to make them friends.

They growled, they barked, they never sat still. I patted them and provided them patiently, then put them under the cart. The dairy was quite far away, and that evening

it was drizzling. Before I went down to the village, the owner shouted to me from the door: "If you have practice, you can get on the cart too." «I calmly set off, and after a hundred meters I jumped on the cart to be pulled by those beasts, who out of habit went towards the dairy without needing to be guided. But suddenly at the end of the street, they saw other dogs, and they began to run after them, barking like devils.

«I was no longer able to slow them down, and after a long run between the first houses in the town, with people shouting and laughing, we ended up falling into the ditch, me, dogs, cart and bins. At that moment, Anna Marì was passing along the street on her bicycle, wearing her white sweater, and seeing me going upside down, she started laughing, and she continued laughing for a long time, continuing to pedal without turning.

«The next day was a holiday and I went dancing in Cormond with some friends. The party was in the middle of the woods, and I danced with Anna Marì and Lilian. Then I left on my own and they still stayed at the dance until late.

«The Berninger house was empty when I returned, and all as shiny as a mirror. I harnessed the dogs and went to the dairy. Salvenach was also almost empty: the youth were having fun in Cormond, at the dance party in the middle of the woods. In Salvenach there were only old people who got drunk on beer. I was alone in my masters' house as evening fell, and on all the surrounding hills the lights were lit, and the stars were already beginning to shine in the sky, clean and fresh from the rains of the day before. I was sitting in my bedroom, which was on the ground floor near the kitchen, and the melancholy made me almost want to cry. Towards late, when all the others in the family had already gone to sleep, I heard some noises in the kitchen and realized that it was Anna Marì and Lilian with their two suitors who were chatting with each other. Then I heard them

having a snack and drinking coffee. But without thinking about them anymore I was losing myself in my sleep, but theirs

continuous conversation always woke me up. From my room, by means of a stove pipe, I could see whether there was darkness or light in the kitchen; so I, who knew the trick, was listening to what was going to happen. The hours passed quickly for them, and from my room I saw that the light in the kitchen continued to stay on, and I heard that all four of them were chatting in a low voice, and Anna Mari was saying:

«Speak softly because the boy who perhaps recently came to sleep can hear us.» Then suddenly I realized that the light had been turned off and that there was complete silence in the kitchen; but I could hear the benches on which we sat at the table to eat creaking. I couldn't sleep and would have cried with anger. In the morning, when I saw Anna Mari, I looked at her and laughed, but she couldn't imagine why. By chance I had to work at home that day, and around twelve Lilian also stopped by, who never stopped chatting with Anna Mari about the lovely evening they had spent. Suddenly I said: "Did you have a good night?", and they remained with their mouths open and asked me if I had been listening to their conversations. I said, "By chance I wasn't sleeping last night and I just heard you.

But it's your business anyway." «Anna Mari, so that I would be angry, instead of denying it, she told rather double what had happened. But Lilian laughed because we got along just as well as any other evening. Anna Mari had become very heated, but little by little she calmed down and in the end she said to me: «I recommend you not to make small talk.» «She had been very much in love with her, but it was my fault if we didn't continue, because on the evening of our walk in the woods I hadn't had the courage to do with her what she wanted; but by now I was bored with Anna Mari, and I didn't care that things had ended that way.

«Many evenings, at sunset, she came up the little uphill road because during the day she went to help her cousin; and I sat there writing some letters about the

my window sill, towards the countryside.

«So she would sit in the courtyard on a pile of slats and we would talk as friends. She actually made me a little angry when I realized that she had given a date to someone else. One Sunday, when everyone had gone out and I was left alone in the house to save some money, I noticed that she was coming up the hill with another young man. She got engaged to him and took him to her room. The next morning I told her:

“Ah, Anna Mari, it’s good to make love!” ““Yes yes,”

she replied as if to displease me.

““Well, dear Anna Mari,” io le dicevo, “for me actually nothing!

For me in Italy she is a friend prettier than you, prettier, prettier!”

6

One evening in early October, although it was raining heavily and it was late, many lights were still on in San Giovanni.

At the taverns the doors were open and threw glittering spots of light onto the flooded and shadowed streets, through which the customers rushed past, bent under umbrellas or covered with bags, sinking their whole foot into the mud rails.

Almost no one had gone to the evening service, the large church and the square remained empty. And Borgo Romans, in front, was lost in the downpour of that now almost winter rain; and also Borgo Monte, except for some movement around the bar: the unusual animation only concerned Borgo Braida, the central street of San Giovanni, around the Enal premises.

The doors and windows of the inn - which in any case had no shutters - were wide open and threw beams of yellow light onto the street and the roofs of the nearby huts, which mingled with the voices and buzz of the interior. In fact, inside, in the two small rooms on the ground floor, and above, in the other two that formed the party headquarters, an exceptional crowd of men - and, unusually, also of women - had gathered. The rooms, both above and below, were filled with smoke: therefore, those people had

already been gathered there for a long time. In fact, the meeting was now about to end. Pieri Susanna, the secretary of the section, next to the desk, was talking seriously with a young man from the federation who had come specifically from Pordenone to take part in that meeting, and who now, before leaving, was taking the

last agreements. Around the two of them were the older ones, both from the party section and from Federterra; and they listened almost gravely, with their faces burned by the air and the wine, to the speeches of the two leaders.

The others were chatting too, sitting at the tables, or crowded together standing to fill the two small rooms with shiny floors with splashes of water.

Above, the meeting of Garibaldi's avant-garde was still continuing; even up there, unlike usual, there was a lot of seriousness and almost concentration.

The young people were sitting on the benches, or standing along the walls, smoking, in their heavy blouses or overalls that smelled strongly of water and litter.

There was Eligio, still pale and thin from the hardships of life in Yugoslavia, with the skin stretched across his cheekbones like a consumptive, and blue eyes that seemed to fall apart at any moment: but cheerful as always, always ready to laugh and to sing. There was his cousin Jacu; there were his younger brothers, Onorino and Livo, who had grown up in the meantime, even if they still wore shorts; and their companions Chini, Ivano, Rino, and all the others from the villages of San Giovanni.

That evening the young people from Casarsa, Comunale and Sile had also gathered there. And even four or five girls from Romans had come. The secretary had just finished speaking: but now they remained together a little longer waiting for the rain, a little to discuss and make the final arrangements. The boys, however, were intimidated.

Eligio, who was near the broken table under the Crucifix and the portrait of Stalin, turned to his companions and blushed and asked:

«Have you nothing to say? Come on, speak up! » The others looked at each other and were silent. "What do you want us ignorant people to say," she exclaimed, laughing, her brother Onorino. "That's fine." Livo, the third brother, the youngest one, who was standing in the corner near the door, took two steps towards the wall

opposite, where, behind the wardrobe, the flag was placed, and laughing he took it out from among the rubble and unrolled it. "Tomorrow you will fly at the head of the Vanguard of San Giovanni," he said.

"Congratulations!" The others laughed in amusement at his words.

"Tomorrow,"

continuous

and

adolescent

Of

Braida,

grabbing it, "we will put you under the noses of the Pitottis and Spilimbergos." «Let them hear clearly what you know about!» Onorino shouted, and shook it hard by the edge: the flag unfolded completely and almost covered the heads of those who were nearby.

"Long live our beautiful flag," Eligio shouted, starting to wave it cheerfully...

It continued to rain heavily outside, and one would have thought that the whole area along the Tagliamento, from the foothills to the sea, must have been almost lifeless under that storm: the desolate villages, the impassable roads, the abandoned fields... Instead, as if San Giovanni, so in all the towns of the district, there was the same animation, the same unusual shining of lights.

Like Eligio and Jacu in San Giovanni, so Milio had gone to the meeting in his section of Rosa, and Nini in Ligugnana, where, one would have said, everyone was standing, as if on the eve of a party full of preparations.

The delegates from all the sections of the Gruarese had been summoned there, and it was there that the leaders of Pordenone and also of Udine had gathered. The party section had its headquarters inside the same barracks where the ballroom was located; the bicycle storage room in the corridor was almost as crowded as on Sunday evening under the dusty electric lamps.

Even the secretary Pieri Susanna, if it hadn't been for the rain, should have been in Ligugnana: his son Mariano had gone down in his place; and in fact it was he, with the final provisions, that everyone was waiting for at Enal. The others took the opportunity to drink a few more glasses, waiting for the next day's success, and ended up starting to sing; young and old had gathered at the counter, Eligio

he had brought the flag down.

Only around eleven o'clock did the rain stop; and those who lived far away stood at the door of the Enal to breathe the raw, humid air and to scrutinize the sky still swollen with clouds that crossed it in disorder. Every now and then a few gusts of sirocco poured down a shower of rain on San Giovanni, making the red sign that hung on the door of the ENAL with the party's coat of arms tremble.

But defying the latest misdeeds of bad weather, those from Casarsa, Comunale and Bosco went away on bicycles, singing, along the muddy road. Moreover, shortly afterwards Pieri's son Susanna arrived from Ligugnana, without bringing counter-orders for the following day; therefore the others also set off towards home, continuing to talk excitedly in the sleep and winter silence of the town.

The following day the sky was still dull and wet: it wasn't raining, but you could feel the cold of the water on your skin and clothes, although a sirocco air continued to blow from the Adriatic. The houses and gardens were dark, down from Casarsa, along the Viale della Rimembranza, to San Giovanni,

San Floreano, up to the first villas in Gruaro, at the end of the long tree-lined road.

Early in the morning, when the ringing of matins had not yet been erased from the air, and the old women had not yet returned from the church to light the fire, the men and boys, and even some woman. With their wheels sunk in the mud, smelling of rain and manure, five or six wagons were lined up along the road, in the cold shade, with their horses watched by the younger boys. Around, impatiently, those of the Avant-garde were shouting, there were almost fifty of them, with their bicycles, ready to leave towards Rosa. "What do you expect?"

Jacu said. «We won't leave San Giovanni anymore if we go after these crazy old men.» «Gruaro isn't leaving!» Eligio shouted from afar.

"The Pitottis and the other lords can escape," Jacu replied.

«We just need to talk to their farmers!» Onorino shouted laughing.

"Why don't you go and tell Susanna that we'll carry on in the meantime," Jacu said to him? "It's better if we're all together," Eligio said undecidedly.

Meanwhile, the others, some astride the bicycle, some holding it by the handlebars, occupied the whole street, talking loudly, calling each other and shouting.

They had tied a red ribbon to their buttonhole. "And who do we give the flag to?" Eligio said. "To me," Onorino, who was nearby, shouted promptly. «Come on, let's give it to him,»

said Jacu; he ran up to the empty rooms of the headquarters and they took the flag.

When Onorino appeared at the door with the flag, all the boys gathered around, with cheerful shouts, and Onorino, excited, began to wave it. «Calm down, youth!»

these

Susanna.

"We

let's go

avanti,»

these

Eligius

taking advantage of the good mood. "That way," she added, "the others, seeing that at least we young people are arriving, won't shout if you're late." "Yes," said Giovanni Blasut, "perhaps it is better for them to go in the meantime." «Go,» said Susanna, «but be careful on the road! No nonsense and great seriousness.

Tell Leon we're coming right away."

«Let's go, guys!» shouted Eligio Pereisson. His brother Onorino, with the flag, and Livo took the lead, and the group of young people set off down Borgo Braida, shouting, in the direction of San Floreano, and there, instead of taking the avenue of Gruaro, they cut down a path of fields towards Madonna di Rosa.

In front of the ruins of the sanctuary, washed by the rain, and throughout the large square, there was already a large crowd waiting for the moment to set off towards Gruaro. In the center, among the groups that crossed each other, carts and bicycles, yes

he saw Leon, with the leaders of Ligugnana and the most important sections, discussing together with the trade unionists who had come down from Udine and Pordenone.

All around, a group of young people from Ligugnana were about to listen to them, looking at them with familiarity but also with respect and keeping a certain distance. With one leg on the saddle of the bicycle, leaning one

shoulder on the trunk of a chestnut tree, Nini Infant also stood with the others, calmly, waiting for orders.

He had a long red handkerchief around his neck, tied under his chin with two or three knots.

«Nini!» Eligio shouted from afar, arriving towards the center of the square with the San Giovanni band. "Old!" Nini shouted, detaching himself from the chestnut tree and pedaling towards him.

«The people from San Giovanni are here!» Germano said to Leon.

"Why so few?" he asked. "It's only the young people," said Germano.

"And the others?" Leon shouted towards the group moving forward.

"They'll be here soon," Eligio shouted. «You get together with the Ligugnana Avant-garde. You will work with them," Leon said, resuming the interrupted discussion with the other executives.

"Today, today!" Nini shouted.

"If I were in Count Spilimbergo's trousers I wouldn't be very happy," said Eligio. Everyone was talking, shouting, looking for each other in the midst of the confusion; in the square of Madonna di Rosa there was almost the crowd of the day of the Madonna festival: hundreds of young people, almost all with red handkerchiefs around their necks, and elderly people, on foot, crowded together, moving and agitating, on the marsh between the plants . The doors and windows of the houses were closed, and below, here and there the flags of the sections were glowing red.

An almost blinding light fell on Gruaro, from an overcast sky.

Black, naked, they could be seen looming behind the embankment of the station, the mountains of Carnia. But in the square, before the more than three thousand demonstrators arrived from the Madonna di Rosa and Prodolone side, where they had gathered, it seemed like it was any other autumn day: in the light of the air, in the square between the two old

Venetian doors, the usual morning events took place; the drivers had got off the Udine bus and entered the large bar under the arcades to drink coffee; some old woman entered or left the church; some girls went up and down, on foot or on bicycles, from the shops in the square to the fish market. But almost in silence, as if intimidated, from Borgo Fontanis and Borgo Favria, the demonstrators began to spread in long and disorderly columns, and in a quarter of an hour they invaded the whole town.

Neither the carabinieri nor the police could be seen in the square or on the streets; the people of Gruaro who had remained outside did not appear alarmed, and indeed some girls, returning home with their full bags, raising their clenched fists against the houses of the rich, shouted: «Make them ashamed!»; the demonstrators, massing in the square, listened to them laughing. In all the streets that led to the center, you could see groups of boys, with red overalls and handkerchiefs, or ancient partisan uniforms with camouflaged caps, and trousers and boots taken from the Germans and Americans; they sat on the bollards or steps of the houses and prevented access. No one could enter or leave the town center anymore.

Under the porticoes in front of the church, those of San Giovanni had gathered together with someone from Ligugnana. It was now starting to drizzle, in the air that had gradually become dark. «Where is Nini?» Eligio asked Basilio who was passing by on his bicycle.

"He's on guard at the Fontanis gate," Basilio shouted. In the confusion of entering the town they had gotten lost: "I'm going to see about him," said Eligio. «No, it's better that you stay with us,»

Onorino said. "Orders may arrive." Eligio shrugged:

"I'm going and coming back," he exclaimed, picking up his bicycle. «We must be ready!» Onorino insisted. But Eligio was now moving away under the rain that was not heavy, but dense, rather, like a fog. "I will be right back!" he shouted. Under the arch of the door, a young man stopped him and asked him seriously: «Where are you going? You can't go out." But at that moment the Nini appeared. «Eligio,»

he shouted "come here, love." The gate sentries had already procured two flasks of wine. "Drink," said Nini.

Eligio, laughing, clung to his neck and swallowed two gulps.

"What do you do?" Nini asked him.

"Nothing for now," said Eligio. "I have a desire..." Nini shouted, with the gesture of squeezing someone by the throat. "Take it easy,"

said the one who had stopped Eligio, «didn't you hear the recommendations of Leon and the others from the Chamber of Labor?

Oh, don't compromise everything with nonsense: we communists are not scoundrels." Nini shrugged, but the discussion was interrupted by Livo's voice calling Eligio from the center of the square, in the middle of the crowd. He was making agitated signs to him while, before leaving, he was giving the fiasco another puff. Livo's face was dark: "The others are leaving."

he shouted. "Move, move." As soon as Eligio was close to him, instead of heading towards the end of the arcades where they were before, Livo started running in the direction of the fish market. In the square hundreds of people passed each other shouting, laughing and swearing.

"Well, now we've lost them," Livo said angrily without looking at his brother. But at that moment someone from Ligugnana passed near them. "Hey," Livo shouted to him, "have you seen our people, Susanna and those from San Giovanni?" "They went down, towards the Pitotti villa," replied the dark-haired man, with a threatening gesture.

«Come on comrades!» he added, shouting after the two brothers who had started running down the school road. Behind these, beyond the canal that in past centuries surrounded the walls of Gruaro, stood the Pitotti villa in the middle of a small garden.

The garden, the road in front, along the edge of the canal, were all occupied; the windows on the front of the house were closed. Livo and

Eligio reached their parents just as Susanna, with Giovanni Blasut and Jacu, were banging on the door.

They had already been knocking for five minutes, but no one came to the door.

"They're in there dying of fear," Livo said.

"Hey, masters, open up," Susanna shouted, taking a few steps back on the gravel and looking towards the windows.

"Open up, otherwise we'll break down your door." After a few minutes the door opened and a large, tall, bald man of fifty appeared in the doorway, carrying a shotgun over his shoulder. It was Pitotti himself, one of the richest owners in the district. "What do you want?" he asked.

"We want to talk to you," Susanna said very loudly.

"There are about a hundred of you here," said Pitotti, "you don't all want to come into my house." "Even just one person is enough to speak," Susanna said, still shouting.

"Okay," exclaimed Pitotti, "but let in a commission made up of a maximum of four of yours." After a few minutes of uncertainty, Susanna, Blasut, Jacu and Eligio entered the corridor.

"From here," said Pitotti.

He led them into his study, where there was a large desk, carefully polished and polished, like all the other furniture and shelves, which were reflected on the floor, but covered with paperwork and dusty, yellowed volumes. Pitotti's uncle was sitting at the desk, also tall and bald, but, due to old age or fear of him, his hands were shaking. Pitotti went to stand behind the desk.

"So?" she said. None of the workers had the courage to speak.

«I'm waiting for you to tell me what you want: if you

you were so kind...» He spoke in the mainland Venetian dialect used in Friuli by the bourgeois. "You speak," Blasut said, in Friulian, to Susanna, who was the oldest. Susanna began to speak, stammering and keeping her eyes lowered. «We have come», she said, «as we have done and will do with all the landowners in the area, so that... you can give work to the unemployed... this is your duty, now that they have made the De Law Gasperi.» «The De Gasperi award!» Pitotti exclaimed. «This affair has been talked about for months, and it also seems to me that there has been a sentence from the court of Udine...» «Nice sentence! It has no value for us," replied Susanna, still looking at the ground, "the representatives of the sharecroppers withdrew before that sentence was issued." "First of all, dear you," Pitotti said with sudden violence,

"Education teaches that we must look at each other when we talk together..." "Calm down, calm down, lower your wings,"

Eligio then interrupted decisively, "you want to take advantage of us ignorant people because you studied and are rich: no one taught us education." He had a menacing look that burned in his fixed, colorless eyes.

"I meant," Pitotti said, changing his tone, "that he seemed to be looking for something on my floor. Do you have rights there too?" "We have no right to his floor," cried Eligio, "we only have the right to work." «And what can I do about it? I'm not in government." "Hire some workers," said Susanna. «If all the landowners in the Gruarese area each hired a small number of unemployed people, the De Gasperi award would peacefully apply here too.» «I have already told you that there is a sentence from the court of Udine. And I stick to that." «That ruling is wrong: why should the award only be applied to a fifth of Friuli? Yes, no one says anything, in Cervignano, in Nimis, in the flooded territories of the Bassa, there will perhaps be even more misery than here. But do we have to starve for this?" «I already told you that I don't

center. I am a private citizen like you, I have my family and I work for them..." "You eat every day," said Eligio. «But there is someone who when he gets up in the morning doesn't know whether in the evening when he goes to sleep he will have eaten or not.»

Pitotti spread his arms. "Oh, you don't think about it?" said Eligio.

«You don't think about it? And who has to think about it then?»

"Our union," said Pitotti, "had made some proposals to help you..." "Good proposals! And then you started making these proposals after weeks of agitation, otherwise would it have ever occurred to you to say to these unfortunates: Come on, here's a bowl of soup, eat, dog?"

«In short: we did what we could do.» «Ah, no, by hiring one hundred and twenty unemployed people you only achieved four percent of the land improvement! The Chamber of Labor was right not to accept: in the entire Gruaro area, giving work to six hundred unemployed people: it's not a big demand that we have.» "These are all excuses," Pitotti suddenly shouted angrily, "all excuses to disguise the political basis of your demonstrations!"

«Political fund?» Eligio replied blushing. «There are unemployed people, and if you don't believe it, come with me, I'll take you to their homes, to see what poverty is. There you can be sure that he won't find marble floors," he added, tapping his foot on the ground.

"In conclusion," Pitotti cut short, "you would like me to start hiring workers on my own initiative. I'll tell you straight away that I won't do it! I cannot go against the law, nor against my union's line of conduct." «But if you have some

heart, he doesn't care at all, neither about the court, nor about the union. By hiring workers, you help families who die in poverty." "I understand," said Pitotti, "but I can't stand alone against my entire category." With that, he made a move towards the corridor.

"Is this his last word?" Susanna said a little palely, moving the hat on her head.

"Yes."

The four stood still, undecided about what they should do.

“But not ours!” Jacu suddenly shouted. “Come on, comrades.” He quickly left the study, followed by the others; when they reached the garden door, the hundred or so demonstrators who were waiting for the outcome of the discussion crowded around the delegates who were standing between the doors.

“Does not want! Does not want!” Jacu shouted.

“Whack him, you’ll see what he wants,” shouted one of the crowd.

“Calm down, comrades,” Susanna shouted. But now they were excited; everyone was pressing towards the entrance, shaking their fists. “What do they want?” said Pitotti who had followed the four to the door.

“Kill you,” Jacu shouted at him in Friulian. Susanna managed to silence the men for a moment. “Okay,” she said. «If we have to occupy this house, let’s occupy it: now let’s all get in here. But be careful what you do, comrades. I’ll send for Leon, and he’ll come and discuss.” “Inside, comrades,” cried Eligio; everyone rushed into the corridor and crowded up to the staircase that led to the upper floors. The boys sat against the walls, on the floor, and began to smoke. Susanna, Eligio, Jacu and Blasut entered the study with Pitotti and sat down at the desk. They had sent Livo to call Leon. «But who finds the Leon now?» said Susanna. «He can’t possibly be a hundred parts like Saint Anthony!» Meanwhile, however, the whole house resounded with the shouts, laughter and discussions of the workers; a small group of four or five who had gone to stand on the steps under the marble railing, after about twenty minutes, since everyone was starting to get tired, began to sing a song.

They spent almost an hour, singing, while outside went

the rain stopped, and at midday the air cleared.

“He’s coming right away!” shouted Livo, entering the study sweaty; and in fact a few minutes later Leon arrived with two managers from the Chamber of Labor. He was a man of thirty, tall, with two broad shoulders; he had a white, square face, with an aquiline nose, two drooping mustaches, and eyes full of a squalid and determined light.

He quickly entered the villa, and everyone crowded around him, greeting him confidently, shouting. «Where is Susanna?» Leon asked hastily; at that moment Susanna told in a few words how things had gone. "Have him come here," Leon said.

Susanna went to get Pitotti from the study.

After a quarter of an hour of discussion, in front of everyone, Pitotti declared that he would sign an agreement in which he promised to hire the workers.

By now the midday bells were ringing. It seemed that good weather was returning; the tired and harsh light faded on the walls and roofs of the town which, behind the canal, stretched darkly around the sports field. Following Leon who was discussing with the foreign leaders, the group crossed the bridge again and returned to the town towards the square. With the lightening of the light and the ringing of the bells, there was almost a festive air. Torrents of demonstrators crossed the square; others were sitting under the porticoes; at the towers, scattered here and there, there were always sentries. They were idle, leaning against the walls, chatting among themselves or shouting with their companions who passed through the square.

Eligio, as soon as he returned, immediately ran to Nini, who was sitting on the ground, in the wet, with his handkerchief as red as blood that was wrapped around his neck. "San Zuan," he cried,

«beif!» (1) and handed the flask to Eligio.

"Whoever wasn't ordered to stay in Gruaro," Basilio shouted as he arrived on his bicycle, "Leon said he can go home and eat." Nini and the others on guard don't

they moved, listening indifferently to Basilio.

"Are you staying here?" Eligio asked Nini.

"Yes, we at the door are staying," said Nini.

«And what do you eat?»

«The women from Ligugnana bring us.»

Instead, at that moment a voice called them: "Hey, comrades!" It was Milio, white and red, with his eyes as hard as glass, blue, looking at them laughing.

«Milio! Where did you come from?" Nini shouted at him, laughing too.

«Where do you want it to come from! I'm here too, like you!"

“Drink!” Nini shouted at him.

«Yes, I drink! I have a Saint Anne that I see darkly!» said Milio; and then, all cheerfully: «I'm going to have a bite to eat with my uncles, nearby. Why don't you come too?" «We're coming, sacrament!» said Nini. «Come on, Eligio.» And he went after Milio, with Eligio behind him, just as the others went the other way: Onorino had taken up his flag again, and was waving it at the head of the group, which followed him singing.

NOTE:

(1) Saint John, drink!

7

The farmhouse of Milio's uncles, the Faedis, was halfway between Gruaro and Rosa, in the middle of the countryside.

Immediately behind began the slopes of the Tagliamento, and, even further behind, the emptiness of the riverbed, as large as a lake, against the shadows of the mountains.

A little sun had come out, and the three friends were pedaling happily along the country road, with the hedges around half gutted by the autumn, dripping with rain.

The first thing they saw, at the bottom of a small hill, there, on the muddy road, among the disheveled rows of vines, was a pale, pale little girl, with a big braid on her head, who didn't know how she was able to hold it up, thin and tiny. how it was.

He had some big lamb's eyes - yes, worthy of the braid -

but which it seemed they could not see, just like those of newborn lambs.

However, she must have been at least sixteen and seventeen years old: and nearby there was another one, younger in age, but much less shy, who, instead, stared at the three partners who arrived cheerful and bedraggled.

«Bye Cecilia, bye Ilde!» said Milio. «No mi saludaisu?» (1) Ilde, the youngest, a "hello", weak, weak, at least she said it herself.

But Cecilia, instead, did nothing but lower her eyes and lower her head, as if the braid had won her and had managed to bend her.

But the three friends didn't even look at her: they paid no attention to that little suckling calf, there on the platform, with her feet

in the grass soft with water, who was looking around for who knows what.

They ran into the Faedis courtyard, through the gate half eaten by the rain. And there Milio greeted again: «Hello, cousins!» They were two boys, who were washing a horse in the tub.

«Hey, Nisiuti!» Milio said laughing, "you're always there with that horse, eh, better than if it were a girlfriend!" The little one looked at him laughing, with the tuft on his forehead, planted on his wide legs with white socks: «Oh yes, of course!» he said. The eldest, who was called Nesto, however, said: «Now you will hear it, my father! Who knows what he will tell you that you went to the square to act stupid! » "What do you want me to tell me," said Milio, shrugging his shoulders, "I also served his interest, not just ours!" "Yes, yes," replied Nesto, forcefully grooming Marco, the colt, "but not the parish priest's!" "Good boy!" said Nini, leaning the bicycle with Eligio against the stone wall. «After lunch you'll come with us to the square

too, eh? And we'll set the parish priest on fire! All the Faedis were inside the house, in the large kitchen with the fireplace.

They were not those who went to make confusion, for this and for that, for the sickle or for the hammer. "We were born poor and we will die poor," Nesto and Nisiuti's father, the old Erminio Faedis, who was the head of the family, always said.

Now he was there, with one foot on the hearthstone, lighting his pipe, rummaging among the embers that crackled in the pile of wood.

«Hello beard, (2) good morning everyone!» Milio said as he entered, with the higher and more shrill voice that came to him when he was happy or when he was a little embarrassed.

«I present to you these two companions of mine!» she then said. «There will be some bread and cheese for them too!» she added, still cheerfully.

"Sit down, sit down," said old Anuta, also near the hearth.

"Who I am?" said old Faedis, expectorating with unprecedented violence, and pulling furiously on his pipe.

"This is Nini Infant, from Ligugnana, and this is Eligio Pereisson, from San Giovanni," Milio said.

The younger brother of the old Faedis, Francesco, who was a small and toothless man, but with a face full of goodness and kindness, said to Eligio: «I am a friend of your father, we served as a soldier together. Oh, we're old buddies!" Eligio and Nini had sat down on the edge of the straw chairs, around the large table in the middle of the kitchen.

“Yes, he told me!” said Eligio.

"How many of you are there?" Francesco asked.

"It's me, two younger brothers and my sister Alba," said Eligio.

"So your father was better than me," said Francesco, opening his toothless mouth, "he made four and instead I only made three: two females, the ones you saw out there, those two crazy ones, and this one here!" And he pointed to a little boy of two or three years old, wrapped up in his rags, playing like a puppy on the floor.

«My father macaque!» said Eligio. «The fewer mouths you have, the better off you are!» Everyone laughed, old Anuta, Francesco, the younger wives, and, especially, the daughters, who were the ones Nini had been observing as soon as he entered. Now they were there laughing, fresh and firm as statues, with lots of curly hair frizzy around their round cheeks. The most beautiful was a certain Regina, the eldest daughter of the oldest of the Faedis.

«But I think I know her!» said Nini, looking at her.

"Perhaps!" Regina said, blushing like an ember, because all eyes were on her.

«But aren't you the girlfriend of Ernesto Castellarin, the one who works at Mangiarotti?» "Yes," Regina said, blushing even more.

"He's a friend of mine," said Nini. "Well, lucky him," he added,

“that has a nice place!” “Of course it has a nice place!” said old Faedis, throwing a tantrum.

"Otherwise, who would give it to him?"

"This is what it means," commented Nini, "to be a friend of the priest: you have the best jobs, and the others go to hell!" Old Faedis looked at him angrily: «Why aren't you friends with him? And then he means that you too are a friend of the priest! » "I'm everyone's friend," said Nini, "but no one will make me change my mind!" "Good boy!" said old Erminio, who was red-haired and easily angered.

But at that moment a screaming, high-pitched voice that hurt the ears was heard from the courtyard.

“Zent!” (3) that woman's voice shouted.

"A is the Owl," said Anuta with the air of an old acquaintance, and prepared for the visit, with all the others.

In fact Gufa immediately entered, a young bride, white and red, bursting with clothes and hair pulled.

"Oooh," she said, as soon as she entered, putting her hand over her mouth. She had seen that there were guests, and then she fell silent, exaggerating her surprise and her embarrassment.

It was exactly what was needed to divert a discussion that could become unpleasant: in Rosa everyone knew that the Faedis were on the side of the priests, while Nini, who was from Ligugnana, could not have known this.

Everyone had laughing eyes, turned towards Gufa, who was standing there with one hand in front of her mouth and the bottle of oil in the other.

"Speak, speak," said old Anuta protectively.

"I ran out of oil," said the mortified Owl, "and I came to see if you could borrow it for me..." "Yes, yes,"

said Anuta, “come here!” And Regina, to be a little funny, with a little cheek: «Just bring it back to us!» «My name isn't Regina!» said Owl, with her head held high, with the apple of her face clearly on display, alluding to something that she, who knows,

when and who knows how it had happened, there, between her and those women, and that in that moment everything seemed to be going in her favor.

« Crazy! Crazy!» Anuta told her, leaning a little on her waist, while she poured the oil on her. And everyone was laughing, with faces that seemed burned by a fire of joy.

Stirring the polenta was Francesco's wife, and Erminio's sister-in-law, Giuditta, a ruddy woman almost like Gufa, although older, with thick lips

and small eyes, almost swollen with laughter: she finished giving the last he twisted the handle in the cauldron and spilled the polenta.

«Come on, call everyone, it's ready!» she shouted busily.

Regina went to the door onto the courtyard and began to shout like a damned woman: «Nesto! Nisiuti! Ceciliaaaa!» Nesto and Nisiuti were there, running from the stable where they had brought the colt Marco, all glittering like gold: but Cecilia and Ilde, those over there...

«Ceciliaaaa!» Regina continued to shout.

Well yes! Imagine if they came. Regina's voice was lost in vain in the courtyard, full of tools, behind the manure tub, behind the small orchard of apple trees, behind the fields with all the rows of almost bare vines among the black mulberry trees, far away, in the peace of the fields of the south.

The only voice that responded to Regina's were Rosa's bells, carried by a slightly warm sea wind, which shook, over there, the tops of the poplars, over here, the greenish leaves of the vines.

«That one won't come even if we kill her!» Francesco said, with a slightly awkward smile in his toothless cat's mouth.

"Why?" said Eligio. "What are you afraid of?"

«Of you, who are young men!» Nesto said promptly, also with that special smile that the Faedis must always have, when Cecilia's shyness was at stake.

"We're not eating it!" said Nini, who felt like a

I'm a little shocked at the idea of that beautiful, shy young girl.

The youngest of the brothers, Nisiuti, made a mischievous face and said: "If someone tells him she's engaged, he'll start crying out of shame!" «Shut up, you, who are still pissing in bed,»

his mother said, silencing him. But he, not at all impressed, approached her plate, saying, like a man: "Isn't he ready yet?" After a while everyone started eating polenta with sausage: it had a smell that would bring a dead man back to life. The Owl was standing there, with her bottle of oil in her hand, continuing the visit, because it was too interesting to leave.

And he did well, because Erminio sent Nesto three or four times to take the wine into the cellar, and after half an hour they were all half drunk, especially the women, who were less used to drinking wine than the men.

They were all giggling, but they weren't so drunk as not to notice it, and, to hide it, they made awkward and naive gestures, wiping their sooty hands on the crossbar, and raising their arms to the sky to invoke the Lord, with the result of making them feel increasingly ashamed. and to find the blush of young brides in who knows what folds of chapped skin.

Even the youngsters enjoyed the old women's joy and made fun of them.

«Who knows how they will laugh behind our backs!» Anuta said ruddyly.

Nini and Eligio, who were at the center of the party, reassured her: "No, no, ma'am, why do we have to laugh?" "They'll say you're crazy old women!" she shouted from next to the hearth Regina, who had finished eating and was standing there with the other young women, all with their faces on fire.

"Shut up, stupid girl!" her mother told her. The girl covered her face with one arm, laughing, and another, even younger than her, defended her: "We have the right to have our say too!"

«Think first about finding a sucker to marry you, and when

you will be the master of the house and you will be able to say anything that comes to mind!» "Well, maybe even now we say less stupid things than you do." «They put on airs because they read the Grand Hotel!» Nesto said mockingly.

"Own! The boy is right," cried Francesco's wife, Giuditta, "he has more judgment than the two of you put together!" She then jumped on Milio,

whose porcelain white skin had been reddened by the wine and his blue eyes had darted.

"What are you saying?" she exclaimed, running to the hearth; and, taking a girl under her chin, he forced her to turn around and be seen by all. «What are you saying!» she repeated. «You are old, agna, (4) and you bring out your judgement. But what do you want them to do with the judgment, with those two kissing faces!"

The girl freed herself and threatened him with the broom that was leaning against the hearthstone. And the indignant old woman shouted:

“Leave my daughter alone, sacr-” “Sacramento!” finished Nesto.

“Look at that other one,” exclaimed old Anuta, “all his cousin!” The degenerate cousin, meanwhile, took the broom with which he had been threatened, and threw it into Eligio's arms, making it fly across the whole kitchen: "Now, sing!" he shouted.

Eligio quickly grabbed the broom, crouched down on the chair, holding the broom in his arms like a guitar, and began to sing his song from when he drank: «Dia bredar, then darling squear, bredar, iù nou mai ert, tuinghling then ...” He was pale as death, with white skin under the blond tuft that fell over his eyes like a rag, and his blue eyes rimmed with red. He had not been well since he returned from Yugoslavia.

«Go and have some more wine!» Erminio Faedis ordered his nephew Nesto, who ran immediately.

"Oh, don't bother about us!" said Nini, while everyone around laughed at Eligio's song to the accompaniment of the broom.

«There is poverty, but for a glass of wine!» he exclaimed

Anuta, touching the words as if they were explosive devices, to be as polite as possible: and the others, hearing her speak so ceremoniously, couldn't help laughing.

"Stupids!" said the old woman, ashamed, and laughing too. The men drank, while the women reluctantly pretended they didn't want any more.

«Give lots of compliments to show off!» said that angel Francis with his poor toothless mouth.

«And then when we're not around, they go into the cellar and have a drink secretly!» he added in his loud red voice, Erminio Faedis.

"Poor old men!" said the women, half-heartedly, laughing. It seemed that the two men gave less importance to the guests than the women, but it is clear that Erminio had done nothing but think about it the whole time. In fact, he turned to Nini, and lighting his pipe, said: «In large peasant families things never go well, one shouts, one cries, one protests... a... a...» He was looking for the word, the comparison, but, although he spoke better than women, his confidence had betrayed him.

"A mess," concluded Milio, from behind the hearth. The girls screamed.

"Shameful!" they shouted. And Gufa, who was half out of breath from talking and making comments, sang, to hide everything: "You can't stay happy all the time and not even melancholy..." Milio, turning to the old man, undaunted, asked:

"Isn't that what you meant?" The old man muttered something, taking the first puffs from the pipe he had finally managed to light, threw the stick he had been using onto the hearth, and continued his speech: «There are sixteen of us here, and everyone wants to assert their rights: one has to make a dress, another needs injections, another this, another that... And we poor men will be in trouble if we don't think about everything, if we aren't always there with our eyes on us...» And he made an awkward gesture, leaning in

forward, clutching the pipe in his hands and widening his eyes: he almost fell to the ground.

"The big families," he continued, turning to the guests with a confidential air, "should split up. Each to his own!"

But how is it done? Look here! Two girls who still have milk on their lips..." "Iiih, Lord!" the girls shouted, throwing their arms in the air.

«A whole row of young calves who haven't finished primary school yet... Nesto, there, in the shop... So who works the countryside? Of course we all have to stay together!" Nini, who had been silent, with a black ringlet on his face pale from the wine, then shouted: "Ah, master, how dare you complain, with all the land you have!" While Nini spoke, the door slowly opened, and, like a ghost, Cecilia entered: and she stood there looking at him.

Nobody had noticed her, because everyone was caught up in the discussion. And, least of all, the Nini.

"Yes! Look here," said the old man promptly, "how many mouths to feed!" «When there is what is necessary to give them, that's enough. Evil is when the necessary is missing!» said Nini.

"I'm not saying that," muttered the old man, "thank goodness we don't lack bread..." "And wine!" Milio shouted.

«And lipstick for the girls!» Nesto wanted to add.

«Listen to them, the two sacrament cousins!» old Anuta intervened.

"You speak well," the head of the family said to her.

"We were born ignorant and foul-mouthed, and we will die that way," Anuta retorted.

«You complain,» continued Nini, «and what should I say, then, who am a poor laborer and don't have even a square meter of my own land? Working all year long with the aim of never having a penny in your pocket.» «We were born to work and sacrifice: it's useless to have ideas in your head!» With Nini the old man was rather harsh, and, to continue, this time yes

he turned instead to Eligio.

"Well," he said almost with intention, "if there wasn't a bit of religion here in this family, to keep us united, to make us understand our duty and resign

ourselves..." "Resign ourselves to what?" Nini interrupted him. His eyes were shining, in his dark-haired face: and around his neck, tight, was the red handkerchief, which gave him an almost bandit-like look.

Cecilia, from her corner, looked at him, and almost started to cry, under her braid, for fear that some ugly conversation might arise between him and his old uncle.

«Resign yourself!» Nini repeated darkly. «Maybe you don't lack for anything, you have a full barn and cellar, with your fifty hectoliters of wine you can buy one dress for the party every year, all of them, and what's more put some money aside... I know I too, who belong to the Church, and if someone swears like Anuta just now, you'll be scandalized!"

He spoke jokingly, yes, but with a somewhat forced sincerity, with anger underlying his gaze.

«Of course, you get along with the priests!» he concluded.

Another time, to bury the discussion, Gufa, from the corner next to the hearth, opened her mouth and with all the breath she had in her throat, and she had a lot of it, she began to sing that it broke everyone's eardrums: «Always cheerful not you can stay and not even feel melancholy." And Eligio took up the broom again, this time standing, with his wide legs pointed firmly on the brick floor; and he started singing a boogie-woogie rhythm in English:

«Then then blin fadar fadar, bounding...» At that rhythm, Milio took the Owl by the hips, and forced her to dance, making her spin like a top on the floor, although she protested by screaming like an eagle.

Everyone started laughing, as before, with their faces burned with joy and their mouths open, bending at the waist: the children louder than the adults, taking advantage of their good disposition, and the adults louder than the children, taking advantage of that moment of

respite from thoughts and worries.

Even the two last entries, the two wild ones, Cecilia and Ilde, were laughing, poor things: Cecilia almost had tears in her little lamb's eyes; yet she laughed, she too, with the others, laughed, laughed.

Then the three young people left. The little bit of sun that had broken through the clouds at midday had disappeared again, and everything was black around. But not in the hearts of the kids.

They pedaled at full speed towards Gruaro, singing.

In Gruaro everything was full of people, already ready to fight: never before had so many young people been seen together. It was as if, three or four years earlier, all the partisans had come down from the mountains.

They were all in the square, around the palace of the Spilimbergo counts, who were neither the Pitottis nor the Malacarts: they were a tough nut to crack.

There was no one at home, they almost always lived in Rome.

At first Leon and the other managers were patient, calling the farmers here and there, then they gave their men the green light. Quickly, the demonstrators knocked down the gate and entered the villa, which was a palace.

Nini, Milio, Eligio, Jacu, the little ones went to sit on the velvet armchairs.

Then, satisfied, they entered the cellars, and down there wine and sausages. And so many took away bags of sugar and flour that their old mothers from Ligugnana or Rosa blessed them.

But then, at the most beautiful moment, police departments arrived from Pordenone in an armored car. The young men of the Avant-garde, inside the villa, thus became besieged from besiegers. But there was nothing that could be done that day with the strength of the people. When the armored car knocked down the surrounding wall and entered the garden, with the policemen on top with their weapons pointed,

behold, a woman, then two, then three, then a hundred went to lie down on the ground, on the mud, under the rain that was falling heavily.

And they lay there, and who could move them?, shouting to the policemen: "Pass, pass, if you have courage, you sons of dogs!"

So the policemen, little by little, had to return from where they had come, and, towards evening, the phone call from the Spilimbergo administrator also arrived accepting the demonstrators' conditions.

Nini and the others were in the cellar of the villa when the news arrived: «The administrator in Codroipo has accepted the conditions that the other landowners have already accepted!» Jacu, who was dead drunk, threw the braid of sausages he had grabbed into the air and kicked the empty flasks. "Out, out, comrades!" Susanna shouted. "We won!" The air was now dark, and the shadows of the defeated policemen and soldiers could be seen beyond the arches of the doors. A large part of the crowd had already spilled out of the garden, onto the square, filling it with clamor and shouts and songs. Here and there the lights in the windows of the houses began to come on, not in the square, but around, in the villages, behind the moat. Everyone called each other, greeted each other, cheerfully.

In a corner Onorino, still with his flag, was astride his bicycle, on the shining mud, together with the others from San Giovanni. «Tomorrow it's San Giovanni's turn!»

said Nini, greeting Eligio and the company. "Tomorrow," shouted Jacu grimly, "we'll show them to the gentlemen!" "See you tomorrow then," said Nini. "Move, Infant," his companions shouted at him as they set off towards Ligugnana. "Until tomorrow!" Eligio shouted after him. Then everyone pedaled towards his house, with a light heart for the beautiful victory.

NOTE:

(1) Don't you say hello to me?

(2) Uncle.

(3) People!

(4) Zia.

8

A sad and dark morning descended on San Giovanni; over the mud and puddles of the day before, which had remained intact during the hours of sleep, the sky burned without light, obstructed by low, white clouds, motionless like the mud and puddles, and against whose light the walls of smoky stones, the poles, the roofs of San Giovanni were dark, wet, in a silence that the rare crowing of the roosters, in the courts of Braida or Romans, made more squalid.

Although usually, with the sound of matins ringing over the still dark town, just tinged with the first pink of dawn, life began very early, that morning the concentration of the night still seemed to weigh on the villages, even though the day was already quite late. In the central street of San Giovanni, immersed in the light that did not reach it, shutters and doors remained closed: in the villages towards the fields, the women, who, as soon as they returned from the morning service, gave the birdseed or lit the fire, their daily jobs silently and quickly, as on some sad occasion, a death or misfortune in the family. In front of Enal, all the

communists, labourers, the unemployed, were gathered together, almost in silence, waiting for the arrival of those from neighboring towns, and were almost trembling in the frozen air of dawn.

Only around eight did the groups from Ligugnana arrive on bicycles; but they were not more than two hundred. They brought the bicycles into the Enal courtyard. With them Saint John recovered a little: since they were not in their country, they

they shouted and sang without fear. "By midday everything is over in San Giovanni," Nini said to Eligio. "You don't know Malacart," Eligio replied, "he's a dog." They had entered the Enal, in disarray since the night before, with wine and mud stains, and the flag leaning on the counter. Jacu stood there, still drunk from the night, with his elbows on the counter, in front of a

tenth of grappa, with his face hollow like that of a consumptive, and with his eyes almost without gaze, although fixed in a menacing expression. Susanna and the others were around, worried because those from the neighboring towns, except Ligugnana, were still not arriving; and those from Ligugnana were less than half of what they had agreed.

"It ends badly today," said Susanna.

"Bad?" shouted Jacu, "for who?" and he started laughing.

"Don't worry, master," Nini said to Susanna, who was a carpenter, "we'll take care of it." "What do you believe?" replied Susanna, "did the police go back to Pordenone, Padua or Mestre?" "Let him be where he wants," Nini shouted, shrugging his shoulders, "we don't care at all." «Yesterday,» said Jacu, «the women of Gruaro took care of it. But if they come back today we'll take care of it." From the Prodolone road he heard himself singing. "Here they are!" said Susanna, coming to the door. In the air which seemed to become even darker as the day advanced, the songs coming from Prodolone had a discordant, discouraging echo; shortly afterwards, demonstrators from Prodolone, Savorgnano, Cannedo and other hamlets appeared at the turning point.

"Everyone here?" said Susanna, seeing that they too did not exceed the number of those from Ligugnana. But they were happy, and standing in front of the Enal, before bringing the bicycles inside, they wanted to finish singing by singing the Internationale at the top of their lungs.

«They sleep in San Giovanni!» shouted a young man from Cannedo. "Yes, they are asleep," said Eligio, "I wish they could." THE

Newcomers were making a lot of noise, shouting and calling each other in front of the ENAL, putting their bicycles down.

"The only ones missing are those from Gruaro," said Susanna, "they're comfortable, they're not farmers." "But even the farmers today in San Giovanni," said one from Ligugnana, laughing, "are celebrating."

"Everyone's locked themselves in," said another.

"Why are we from?" said Onorino. "We say the gentlemen," said the one from Ligugnana, "and those idiots who are with them!" After a while those from Gruaro also arrived; they divided into three columns, and spread throughout the country.

The Malacart house was located approximately halfway between the Enal and the square, near the schools, also in the middle of a garden, surrounded by a high wall: it was at the end of that wall that the church square began, with the cooperative, and immediately after the lodge.

There, in the square and in the centre, everything was closed in silence and as if uninhabited, until the demonstrators moved from Enal: they arrived singing, with red handkerchiefs around their necks, in an irregular line, in front of the church where the air was so turned off and it looked like it was going to start raining again at any moment.

In the town, however, there was ultimately a sense of tranquility, and almost of concentration, where the steps, the voices, the songs of the striking workers seemed to sink in, to have a passing meaning, from which the old peace of San Giovanni did not it was just cracked.

But after less than a quarter of an hour, shouts and whistles were heard from the side of Malacart's villa, the echo of which came in a confused way at times. The workers, like the day before in Gruaro, were occupying the house. It was the largest group, which crowded the street between the schools and the square. Even there the gate of the villa, onto the bare and dripping garden, was closed, and at the end you could see the house which seemed uninhabited. The workers began banging on the gate, and throwing stones into the garden, beyond the wall. Some stones came right up against it

the front of the house, against the door and windows, or on the tin slats of a shed: but everything in the house remained closed and silent. Demonstrators on the street shouted and whistled.

After some time they began to bang hard on the lock of the gate with the bar. At those more violent and decisive blows than the others, a shutter of

the house opened ajar, and the head of a man with red hair and skin almost the same color appeared.

"What do you want?" I scream.

"We want to talk to you."

"Speak!" he shouted again, "about what?"

"Open for us," they shouted from the street, "or we'll tear down the gate and all enter your house." "Thugs!"

he shouted, and closed the shutter.

The others began tearing down the gate again. But shortly thereafter Malacart appeared at the door, shotgun in hand.

"Let's hear what you have to say," he shouted. "Only one come."

Behind him, from the half-open door, the old servant came out, limping across the courtyard to the gate and opening it.

"If more than one shot goes in," he shouted.

The demonstrators discussed among themselves for a few minutes, then Susanna headed with the old woman towards the door. She stayed inside for more than half an hour. Meanwhile it had started to rain again; the demonstrators had gathered in long lines against the walls of the houses in front, under the sloping roof, inside the doorways. Someone had gone up to the loggia and under the portal of the church, almost two hundred meters from the villa. The rain pattered loudly on the mud and puddles. Susanna finally went out into the garden, throwing her hat back over her face, red and burnt, as if she had been drinking; she laughed as she came forward with her hands in her pockets.

"Nothing nothing!" she said.

Everyone ran around him. "How did it go?" most of them shouted

far away.

"Nothing, nothing, he doesn't want to," the others replied angrily, indignant and discouraged; in a few moments almost everyone had crowded in front of the gate, shouting.

"Come on, let's go in," Blasut shouted.

"Let's go in, it's his fault," said Susanna; they took a few steps together into the garden, to occupy it; but a shutter on the ground floor opened, and the barrel of the shotgun stuck out.

«Look, I'm shooting!» Malacart's voice shouted from within.

They scattered here and there from the gate, behind the low wall, and began throwing stones at random at the villa.

You could hear stones hitting the walls or the tin roof of the woodshed.

Jacu, who had gone with Eligio and the other companions to take shelter from the water under the loggia, came and asked Susanna what had happened.

"The old thief," said Susanna, "doesn't want to give us the satisfaction."
«He would sell her mother for a hundred lire,»

Eligio shouted.

"In Ligugnana," said Nini, "we would have already done the math by now."
"What do we do?" Jacu asked Susanna looking into her eyes.

Susanna shrugged. "In the meantime we'll keep him locked up in the house," she said, "you'll have to decide. He's tough but we're tougher." Jacu continued to stare at him, with the rain sticking his hair to his forehead and eyes. "I'll take care of it, sacrament," he shouted, and approached, pushing his way through the half-open gate. He could always see the barrel sticking out behind the shutter. Before Susanna, who had followed him, could prevent him, he took his gun out of his jacket pocket and fired a shot towards the window; after an instant the shotgun responded to him: the

bullet landed a few meters above the heads of some men who were lined up under the eaves, on the wall of a farmhouse.

Jacu raised his arm again to shoot, behind the gate column, but Susanna grabbed him by the sleeve. "Don't shoot," she yelled, "stop." "Stop it," Eligio told him, "you crazy person."

"But that dog deserves it," Nini shouted.

"Everyone deserves it," said Blasut, "but in the meantime we're still losing out." "Leave me," Jacu said whitely, almost trembling. "Leave me, sacrament, I want to show that son of a dog myself." "Put that gun down," said Susanna,

"Don't act ignorant." "I'm going forward," said Onorino Pereisson suddenly. "I really want to see if he has the courage to shoot." "Listen to that other one," said Susanna. «Get out of here instead, you newbie! I don't want your father to take it out on me." "My father won't do anything to you," the boy said.

"He won't do anything to me," Susanna shouted, "because you don't move from here." "Come on, let me go inside, he won't be able to shoot me," Onorino said.

Livo who was there next to Onorino, wearing shorts, and Chini, another of their companions who was also no more than fifteen years old, said: "we'll go with Onorino." "To Gruaro," shouted Onorino, "the women, and today we young boys." With a jerk he broke away from Susanna, and followed by his two companions, he entered the middle of the gate and began to advance along the little street.

A shot rang out: but Malacart must have aimed in the air, just to scare him.

"Master, master," cried Susanna, sticking out her head,

"Be careful what you do, they're kids!" But behind the boys who continued to move forward slowly, the bravest ones set off, almost in silence.

"Be careful," said Susanna, "he has no heart." Little by little they were invading the whole garden, and by now the first ones had arrived under the door, when one of those who had gone to San Floreano, from Gruaro's side, came running from the street and shouted that the police were coming from the avenue. .

At the end of the road in Borgo Braida, among the stone houses

without windows, even before all the workers had left Malacart's garden, the armored car from the day before could be seen advancing, followed by three or four trucks full of agents.

The column had stopped almost at the height of the Enal, and slowly, holding their weapons tightly in their hands, the men jumped out of the trucks onto the mud of the road. Susanna sent a boy to call those who had gone towards Casarsa.

"We're not moving from here," he said. "If they start hitting them, we'll hit us too!" Moreover, almost everyone had a stick, some a billhook, and they formed a sort of barricade in the middle of the street.

The armored car, uncovered, was advancing slowly towards them:

"Disband," shouted the captain standing on the seat. Nobody answered him. He shouted the order again two or three times.

Thus the armored car was only a few meters from the workers, and continued to advance at walking pace, until it was on top of the first ones, without stopping; they made way, cramming to the right and left of the road; the armored car continued to proceed until it reached the other side of the crowd, but when the officers behind it started to follow it, the demonstrators blocked their path. The policemen threatened them by shaking their truncheons, and the crowd raised their billhooks, sticks and fists; at that moment, from the end of the Braida village, those who had gone to the Tullio's in San Floreano appeared, walking in disorder and shouting, and as the troops passed, they had dispersed throughout the gardens and fields; almost at the same time the others arrived from the square, sent for by Susanna. The officers, seeing so many crowds crowding

in on all sides and squeezing the armored car in the middle, were alarmed and began to strike. After a few minutes there was only a tangle of bodies in the middle of the street, locked in a confused struggle.

The whole street, from the schools to the square, was in turmoil, and no one understood what was happening on the other side. There were three or four hundred workers, but there were also many agents.

The fighting was fiercest in front of Malacart's gate, and from there it spread in all directions.

But the elderly began to disunite, limiting themselves to dodging the policemen when they ran into them and pushed them: they looked at them a bit like kids look at grown-ups when they scold them, closing themselves in an expression that was both circumspect and venomous: they did their humiliation, a kind of postponement to other more propitious moments, a repressed threat. They moved away alone or in groups from the center of the fight, slowly, as if it were happening inadvertently: some took shelter against the walls of the houses, others pushed themselves up along the sheer walls of the enormous Gothic style church built fifty years earlier, along the little road that led, in fact, between the church and the loggia, to the sacristy, and to the priests' cinema: and from there they watched what was happening in the center of the square, in the mud; still others had even turned down Borgo Romans, moving away a few dozen meters from the square.

Those who gave in and retreated were mainly those from San Giovanni, who lived around there: the boys from the other towns, especially from Ligugnana, instead continued to stay under the armored car, fighting, in disorder, in groups, with the agents, interspersing the fights with arguments and insults. But they had the worst of it, because they didn't feel sure of what they were doing, they felt isolated, left to their own devices; many bruised and even bleeding, followed the elderly people of San Giovanni, down to Borgo Romans, and entered the houses to bathe their wounds with water.

But suddenly, down the Viale della Rimembranza, from Casarsa, four or five army trucks, full of soldiers, were seen arriving and stopping at the corner of the square, under the red wall of the kindergarten. Susanna, who,

although not taking part in the young people's fights, was with them, accompanied by Blasut and some other elders of the

section, saw them, raised his cap to his forehead and said to those around him: "Let's go, let's go", and set off towards Borgo Romans followed by the others.

"Let's go, let's go," he kept saying, passing among those who were continuing the skirmish with the police all around him.

«Non

everyone

and

a

part,"

he shouted

Susanna.

Suddenly the retreat turned into a flight. The boys, seeing themselves now alone and dealing with the agents and soldiers who, having got out of the trucks, were preparing to attack each other, began to run away towards San Floreano, or towards Borgo Romans.

They ran away just like when, just a year or two before, they were caught by their owners stealing peaches or grapes in some field: and as they ran they let out almost happy shouts, because even managing to escape was a success over the policemen.

Even those who were running down Romans scattered, some to the right and some to the left of the level crossing, along the path of the Portogruaro railway line, or in the courtyards of the houses.

Others went even further down the village, up to where the first fields began, with bare vines along the terraces.

A whole small group from Ligugnana was going that way, at a brisk pace, and chatting excitedly: two or three would have liked to continue down the fields, perhaps as far as the Marzins wood, and there wait for the evening, for things to calm down, others wanted stop in some of the houses around there: it was in fact raining harder and harder, and they were all wet, with their hair sticking to their foreheads, and their jackets dripping.

The large red handkerchief that Nini wore knotted around his neck was almost purple, it was so soaked, and hung heavy on his chest: but he didn't care, and he hadn't lost his pride at all. Nini was one of those who would have liked to stop there, without running around the fields in the rain: al

thinking of the police he would shrug his shoulders, or make a contemptuous snap with his mouth. "What do you want them to do," she said,

"They will never be like the Germans again!" At that they were joined by Eligio, Onorino and Livo who came forward with their father, covering their heads with their jackets, up the muddy road, between the farmhouses at whose thresholds the elderly women stood watching with their hands on their laps, and the girls, excited, talked, shouting and laughing.

"What are you doing there?" Eligio said to Nini and the others. "Come on, come on, come away!" "Where do you want to go?" said Nini.

"You don't want to be out here in the rain. Come to our house, and let's wait for it to be over!" "Let's go," said Nini.

Everyone set off, happy with the decision, with long strides, chatting, along a lane, between two farmhouses with stone walls, blackened by smoke and damp, they walked along the coast for a while.

a small canal with very green banks, followed towards the fields by a row of hazelnut trees and reddish vines, and they soon arrived at the large farmhouse where the Pereissons lived.

There was great excitement in the courtyard, the women were shouting from the galleries and the stables, other men and boys, returning from the demonstration, were standing in the porticoes or under the eaves.

"Let's go in, let's go into the house," said Eligio. Inside the kitchen they could barely fit, upright and awkward, between the poor chairs, the long worm-eaten table and the cupboard with the photographs stuck to the glass; it was dark, The hearth was unlit and clean.

"I can't even tell you to sit down," said Eligio's mother, blushing a little under her old chapped skin and black handkerchief. «There are many of you...» «We are a team!» Nini said cheerfully. For a while they remained there, in the dark kitchen, still excited, waiting for the news from the town: which, of course, did not change: those who gradually arrived always said that the square was still full of police, and all the demonstrators had scattered around.

It was better to wait until the evening, and then leave secretly.

Despite this, the boys were always waiting for something: they went to the door every moment, argued passionately, laughed...

But little by little, as time passed and there was nothing new, they calmed down. «Why don't we go to the stable!»

said Eligio, "we spend our time better there, in the heat." "Take off your jackets," said Eligio's mother, "while Alba and I will light the fire and dry them for you."

The boys, embarrassed and amused, laughingly took off their light jackets, and so, in their shirt sleeves, they went out into the courtyard and ran into the stable. It was a small stable, because the Pereissons had little stuff: at the manger there were two cows, and, in a corner, inside a pen, a calf. The boys sat down on the benches or on some clean straw: four of them, after a while, began to play blackberry, at first as a joke, then little by little, enthusiastically, they started playing a game. Eligio stood up: "I'm going to get a puc of wine," (1) he said. He returned soon after with a flask of his red wine, and a deck of cards, which he had gone to borrow from a neighbor. At

that sight a great joy came into the hearts of the boys: in the humid heat of the semi-dark stable, they prepared to enjoy a nice game of cards, sitting on the stones on the floor, around the stool that served as a table: the words of challenge that they exchanged the opposing couples, on the other hand, were full of intimate joy, of poorly concealed satisfaction. Everyone played, some at cards, some at cards, inside the stable: with great commitment, and with the old enthusiasm of winter evenings. Time passed too quickly. Only Onorino wasn't playing, and he was watching, crouched down, with his English blouse open on his chest, and his short peasant trousers. Until it came time to look after the cows: and Onorino helped Eligio with the work, while the others, continuing to play, teased them from time to time, making fun of them a little. Eligio replied

cheerfully on the rhymes, and Onorino laughed silently, casting cheerful glances around. When they had finished working with the shovel on the fresh manure and with the fork on the mangers, Eligio, instead of returning to his place to play, went to lie down on a pile of hay: he wasn't feeling well, perhaps due to all those efforts of the day, and for all that water he had taken. His eyes were always cheerful, they were very small, and his tight skin looked like that of an old man: but he did not lose heart, and, over that little fever he had, he laughed about it.

He took care of sending Onorino to see how things were going.

The rain had stopped: indeed, along the mountains which were only about fifty kilometers away from San Giovanni, they were outlined along the horizon as gray and white as a row of altars, the sky had cleared. And against that supremely serene background, which seemed already invaded by the peace of the night, the stables and houses were dark, colored a deep brown, smoky and dripping. The plants of the gardens and fields stood around in a hopeless immobility.

Onorino ran lightly, jumping over the puddles on Via Romans, while all around, with the smell of toasted polenta and the wet fagots burning on the hearths, the usual buzz of dinner spread.

There were people on the street too, just like every evening.

As we approached the square the animation ceased: but not completely. Even there in the square the worst was over. There were people going shopping, and many girls taking milk to the dairy, on bicycles, with the cans clanging festively against the handlebars. Further down, in Borgo Braida, the Enal was closed: and, in front of the portico that led to the courtyard where the demonstrators' bicycles had been piled up, two or three policemen were standing, with a few kids around who were looking around. But the courtyard wasn't packed with

bicycles as before: indeed, one wall was now completely empty: it meant that many had already left.

Onorino ran back up to Romans: he had good news to give, and he couldn't wait to do it.

The others were still there playing inside the stable, in their shirtsleeves, immersed in their games, with their eyes shining from that little clinto wine they had drunk from the Pereissons' glass.

"There's nothing left," said Onorino, entering among them, with his beautiful, honest face of a boy, full of poorly concealed enthusiasm, "the policemen don't say anything anymore." The others stopped playing: perhaps with a bit of regret, and showed themselves worried and distrustful towards the boy's optimism: therefore they asked him many questions, to which he always answered taken from the important role of informer and from the sense of joy he felt in his news. Now everything was over, everything was back to normal.

"Come on, come on, let's go," Nini said as usual, first, "we don't have to stay here until tomorrow morning!" "What can they do to us, then," he added, "even if they had to stop us: by now..." The light and patched jackets, placed in piles on the backs of the chairs around the Pereissons' fireplace, were dry. The boys from Ligugnana put them on, making a bit of noise: with Eligio and Onorino's mother watching them with their hands on their laps and Alba and the other girls standing red in a corner of the kitchen.

"Goodbye, madam, and thank you," shouted those from Ligugnana. on the threshold. «Goodbye, Eligio.»

"Goodbye, boys, I greet you," said Eligio, burning with fever, laughing with his hands in his pockets. "Goodbye, goodbye," the others shouted again as they crossed the courtyard and turned around. "Goodbye," said Eligio again, "best wishes!" The evening was already deeper, and a few stars were shining in the clear part of the sky.

Borgo Braida was always much more deserted than the rest of

town: the long row of gray stone houses stretched here and there, like walls, with closed doors, without light in the windows.

Silent and suspended, the boys from Ligugnana approached Enal: ready to go back if things took a bad turn. They walked in line on the small sidewalk, along the worm-eaten doors, under the dark windows of the stables... The door of the Enal was open and a rectangle of yellow light sizzled sadly on the mud.

The boys passed in silence in front of the door of the Enal, slowly: and they saw, inside the shop, between the straw chairs, on the wet floor, two or three policemen drinking some of the tavern's white wine as an aperitif.

They too saw them but remained indifferent.

Joyfully, then, Nini and the others, quickly and quickly, before those there could change their minds, entered the courtyard, where only their bicycles remained, upside down on top of each other, they took them and having reached the road they mounted them in silence, pedaling slowly through the village of Braida.

At that moment the bells for the evening service began to ring, and their din was all the louder the more silent everything around was: but it was the silence, now, of all the evenings, the evenings of San Giovanni, of Casarsa, of San Floreano, from Gruaro, from all the surrounding towns. In the intervals between the tolling of the nearby bells, one could hear, in fact, far away, other bells, equal to these, but strangely feeble, incomprehensible,

almost magical, as if their distant babble came from the heart of other past centuries.

Then when the boys from Ligugnana passed in front of the church, from the half-open door, with the flickering, humid and reddish light, distinctly the voices of the songs came out from inside the church, shouted by the women: «Del vivo pan del ciel gran sacramentooo ...» And the chimes, overhead, louder and louder, which seemed to make the poor stone walls tremble

of San Giovanni.

Then the boys, gaining more and more quickly the last houses of the town - scattered among the vineyards and the last corn canes, along the Gruaro avenue - not wanting to give themselves up, began to sing too, at full strength, with their voices that were lost in the silence of the cold, green fields:

«Forward people, to the rescue, red flag... red flag...»

NOTES: (1) I'm going to pour some wine.

Part two: 1949

1

It was a Sunday afternoon: all the Faedis girls had gone ahead to Rosa for vespers. Only Cecilia and the youngest, Ilde, were still at home, finishing getting ready, amidst the reproaches of the older women. Cecilia was wearing a new dress for the first time that Sunday, and she was very excited.

Some girls, who lived in a small hamlet even more lost in the countryside, came by to pick them up.

They were more unscrupulous and cheerful girls than those of the Faedis: they didn't go to vespers, but to dance.

The Faedis house was made of stones. You entered through a large gate open in the courtyard where for years out of use tools, wheels, hoe handles and plow blades had been covered in dust and rotting in the rain. But on Sunday everything seemed shiny, new, under the still strong October sun, without a straw or a reed. The boys and men were outside: and the light stood calmly among the trees of the orchard, almost bare now, but still full of birds.

Cecilia and her younger sister slept in the same small room, on the ground floor, between the kitchen and the bedroom. There was only one small window, which looked out towards the mountains, in the humid twilight of a ditch, along which the path passed in that muddy spot.

«Cecilia, Cecilia!» they called their friends from there. She went to the small balcony with her braid still loose in one hand and the comb in the other.

"It's good, little girls," he shouted, "come in!" Having gone around the farmhouse, they entered the small room.

"Are you still there?" they asked, indignantly, loudly.

«Anyway, it's useless, he won't leave me!» said Cecilia, but almost laughing.

“Ah, kill him!” said Ines.

Cecilia was still braiding her hair, twisting it around her little lamb's head, with the hairpins clamped between her lips.

She finished quickly, and took the new red dress from the dresser, which almost blinded, but the more it blinded, the more it aroused the admiration of her friends.

“We need to get it wet!” they shouted, helping Cecilia to put it on. And in fact, as soon as Cecilia was ready, they all went into the large room, laughing like crazy.

The women, hearing them, grumbled something, but also cheerfully. Cecilia took the rubber tube, placed it in a barrel, and, sucking it, made the black wine gush out. They drank almost a glass each, and left the room laughing even harder.

"Move!" shouted Giuditta, Cecilia's mother.

«They're ringing the service!» At Rosa's the bells were ringing: the house was almost a kilometer away from the town, and the tolling spread solitary and pure across the countryside.

It was almost four o'clock, and there was already some activity on Rosa's single, long street: young men were racing past on bicycles, or stopping in front of the taverns. They came from Casarsa, Valvasone, San Lorenzo, and even further afield.

Some were already standing still in the town hall square, astride the saddle of their bicycles: but the custodian boys weren't ready yet.

«I wonder if he'll come!» the girls said.

"Who comes?" Hilde asked.

«The one from Ligugnana!» Ines shouted laughing.

Cecilia blushed and pretended not to hear.

The cinema hall, where people danced at the party, was in

beginning at the town: right there the road made a slight bend, so that you could see almost the entire embankment, high and green, on which a small, ancient church, with its low bell tower slightly detached, was glowing red in the already veiled sun. The children were playing on the embankment, waiting for the service to begin: the old women, dressed in black, began to enter instead.

Shortly afterwards the boys from the orchestra, the «Fiorita» arrived.

from Valvasone, on bicycles: all already a little drunk, and, holding their instruments in their arms, they sang or exchanged cheerful words with the young men from other villages who knew them.

Cecilia and her companions stopped for a while in the square, in front of the hall.

«Come anyway, come on!» Ines said. Ilde looked at her and her sister Cecilia with a stern expression. "Yes!" said Cecilia bitterly. The young men began to enter the room, leaving their bicycles stored in the courtyard. Even the first, more daring girls began to go inside. In the background you could hear the chords of the instruments, and the saxophone intoning "Americano I don't want to sing..." Cecilia's companions were eager to enter. «Come with us inside, come on, at least for a moment!» they told her.

Cecilia glanced at her sister, who still had a look of disapproval on her face. "Just a moment!" she exclaimed.

Thus they passed, a little happy and a little scared, through the courtyard, under the gaze of the young strangers.

On the stage the orchestra was ready, but the girls were still few, and the young men, in crowds around the fence, were ready to attack them as soon as the first song began.

Among a group of friends, near a column, there was Nini, with his usual light-hearted air, his face baked by the sun, the cold and work; he was almost distracted, and had his hands buried in the pockets of his gray trousers, well pressed, new, the party trousers.

Cecilia's companions, looking at her, made a special expression. They bumped her elbow, and said, "Here he is!"

The orchestra had cheerfully started with a double step, which resonated even louder in the almost empty room: but, behind that music, the bells announcing the start of the service could also be heard ringing.

«Goodbye, goodbye, girls!» Cecilia said, pushing her sister out of the room.
«Have you seen the one in Ligugnana?» Ilde said.

Cecilia had a scared expression. She regretted having entered the room: she had never done so. And some old neighbors

Of

casa

he could

have it

vista.

Out

sounded

sadly the bell: the embankment was deserted. And the light of the already low sun, from the sky without a cloud, hit obliquely, shaving the almost too green countryside, the little houses of the town, stained with damp and crumbling from the long heat of the summers, the deserted vegetable gardens, the gray courtyards, in among which, in the disorder of the chicken coops and pens, some old mulberry trees shone. By now it felt like evening was approaching.

In just a few months, many things had changed. First of all, Nini had found a job, thanks to the help of his friend Castellarin, who worked at Mangiarotti, with the recommendation of Rosa's parish priest. He had been working at the explosives depot for a while now, and he had also transformed a bit: he had always been an advanced young man, but now he was even more so. He seemed like someone from the city, dressed properly, always cheerful and with a superior air.

He too, like Eligio and Milio, should have left for the army: but, of the three, only Eligio, perhaps, would have had to go and become a soldier, if his health had not played tricks on him.

Reforming him, they hadn't reformed him: but in recent times, he had lost more and more weight, he was all skin and bones. Blame the storm.

The storm had come that summer and ruined the entire harvest. Precisely in the times in which Eligio and Nini were in

Yugoslavia. So, when he returned home, Eligio found twice as much poverty as before. Because, who had been damaged most by the storm? Small owners.

Those two fields cultivated with corn and vines on which all the Pereissons lived had been half destroyed by the hail: and the family no longer knew how to get by. Debts and poverty. So Eligio went to work in a quarry, towards Cordovado, which sucked his blood and soul.

Eligio was the oldest of the brothers, which is why he had to go and become a soldier. Not Nini, because he was an only child: the others had died, one from illness as a child, and two in war, in Albania.

And Milio was the last one in the house, and the soldiers had been made by the older ones.

The only ones for whom things had not changed and had always remained the same were the Faedis. Home and church, home and church, of course nothing changed: he who has no demands doesn't even have sorrows!

Indeed, all the Faedis, young and old, were going through a period of joy and emotion, because the time was approaching when Regina would get married to Ernesto Castellarin: the wedding had to take place by spring. And it was winter: there was little to do in the fields: at most cut the reeds, or do some small jobs in the courtyard and in the vegetable garden for which there was no rush.

So there was a lot of time to chat, joke, make plans.

By now it was getting dark early: when the Angelus bells rang at Rosa's, the countryside was deserted, and the dinner fires sparkled on the old steps of the thresholds.

At the isolated, dead and loud shots, which announced the evening service, the whole Faedis house resounded, even though it was so far from the town: but between the Bassa, vast and fresh under the first stars, and the circle of the mountains, the air it was so pure that even the tolling of the bells could be heard

distant: those twins of Gruaro, those, high-pitched and vociferous, of San Floreano, those, already very distant, of Casarsa...

In the Faedis house, then, the usual voices were raised.

«Move, the children are waiting!» the old women shouted from the kitchen.

«Yes, yes, shut up!» the girls answered from Cecilia's room.

“You still have the courage to answer, huh?” some of the older women shouted, if she was as nervous as she was.

«Ugh!» Ilde shouted.

Like every evening the girls had to go to nursery school in Rosa.

Cecilia, Ilde and all the others were Daughters of Mary, and so they had frequent relationships with the nuns of the Asylum. They were very particular relationships, to tell the truth, in which the friendship, very simple and noisy, as it always is between peasant women, at a certain point stopped because, beyond, extended, in all its breadth, the dominion of the Lord.

The nuns, in character, resembled the girls in every way, the Queen, for example: or, the older ones, had very little different from the women of the house, even physically: they were talkative, secretly lovers of company and cheerful moments, and they too had their weaknesses.

One of their main concerns was to maintain exemplary composure, in praying, in keeping their hands clasped, in swallowing the sacred host and in all these things: in short, to continually maintain themselves in a state of mind equal to that which from the lives of the most modern saints, Don

Bosco, Santa Rita of Cascia. On the other hand, since they were forced every day to carry out the humble and common tasks of the Asylum, they had never completely overcome their resemblance to the women of their mental elevation, which was not so high, given that they also came from peasant families, Venetian, or even Friulian.

But despite their equality, there was something that made them seem distant and happy towards the girls. These nuns had clean, respectful and distinct images, each with her favorite, and, since they were close, each with her least favorite. Regina loved Sister Maria, Cecilia Sister Celeste... Sometimes they criticized them openly and cheerfully, queuing up in the stable: but always with the impression of the divine underneath, well rooted, which poured out from the nuns as from characters with an immobile life and fixed once and for all, a bit like that of the figures of the holy cards, the Sacred Heart, the Pilgrim Madonna, the Baby Jesus.

The girls had an impression of religious inferiority and at this point their friendship with their mothers found its natural limit, and each one fell back into the field that was assigned to her: as on either side of a river: the girls on this side, given over to crazy joy, to the ill-concealed hope of marrying a handsome boy, to quarrels with cousins; beyond, in a white light the mothers, also not at all devoid of human weaknesses, but invested with a mysterious and somewhat romantic destiny.

Cecilia and the other Faedis girls frequented the nuns not only for church reasons: they also went to help them during the summer, at the time of the heliotherapy colony, or they went to them to learn embroidery, mending and other women's work, or, finally, taking turns to accompany the little ones in the family to nursery school.

Like every evening, the Faedis girls went towards the town, in the already dark air, arm in arm and walking quickly.

The kindergarten was not far from the church, right at the point where the road, in front of the cinema, widened and branched off, next to the town hall loggia. It was a small pink house, with large patches of damp, and behind it, a courtyard shaded by large chestnut trees.

While walking, the girls were wisely silent. Only in

sight of the first houses of the village, Regina, who was now about to get married, and therefore had increased in dignity and knowledge, shouted cheerfully, seeing a group of young people leaning on their bicycles towards the square: «Shut up, girls, those are there, those stupid!" Cecilia made herself very small, clutching with greater dignity the black veil that she held folded in her hand: but the others, without paying attention to her indifference, began to walk more stiffly, closer arm in arm with each other, even if they were unable to hold back some gestures. impetuous that unmasked their curiosity, their emotion, and their concern to ignore anything other than the nuns waiting for them.

They went straight towards the kindergarten, especially since on the lawn of the embankment, around the low wall, they were gathered together with the other Catholic children, their cousins and brothers, who had to go to confession. But, at the bend in the road, in front of the worm-eaten door of the cinema, where the young men with their bicycles stood on the glistening mud, there was no doubt that something was bound to happen.

«Here are those of the Faedis!» a young man from Braida shouted ironically.

They walked away proudly, just trying to avoid the tracks shiny with water.

"Ugly!" the boy then repeated jokingly. Ilde was not good at holding back, and amidst the alarm, but also the tacit approval of the others - after all she could do it, because she was not yet fourteen - she shouted: "You will be ugly!" «Listen to her, the one who still tastes like milk!» said another from Braida.

Ilde, struck to the quick, with a lump in her throat, continued to walk arm in arm with the others, trying to adapt her pace to the dignity of the adults.

The boys laughed: in that one the little door of the contract, nearby, opened, with its dusty glass with rows of postcards, and

Regina's boyfriend, Ernesto, and "the one from Ligugnana" went out together. Both were lighting up the national team, and stopped there in front among the others. Ernesto only smiled, waving slightly towards Regina, who blushed with pleasure, greeting him softly too. Nini leaned against the door jamb, with his blouse unbuttoned and his hands in his trouser pockets.

He watched in silence, ironically, smoking his cigarette.

When two or three young boys took the bicycles and began to run around the line of girls, brushing past them and forcing them to lose some of their proud behavior, he too took a few steps along the road, separating himself a little from his companion, and like the Faedis they passed him in front, with a smile creasing his forehead, he said in an almost low voice: "Hello, don't you know me?" But the girls actually started running towards the kindergarten: and this renewed Ilde's esprit de corps, and she began to shout again at the boys who followed them, as they deserved: "Stupid, ignorant people, go to sleep!"

The boys, after having followed them to the low wall of the kindergarten, where they could hear the voices of the children saying their prayers together, went back towards the cinema door, with their bicycles careening happily in the mud, and their handkerchiefs, colored, tight around the neck, fluttering under the patch of light from the electric contract lamp.

Ernesto was a handsome boy, blond, already a little balding, and the skin on his forehead was a little red where his hair was thinning. He was the only one who had on a coat, brownish, which he kept with great care. Now here he was laughing, watching the girls run away.

«They didn't even look at you for the three of cups!» she said to Nini, laughing.

«What does it matter to me!» said Nini, raising his hand

shoulders, cheerful, without the slightest shadow of displeasure. He went to his bicycle and got on it, pushing it at a run, with a jump. The other two or three workmates from the contract also came out and, all together, they

began to pedal down towards San Floreano, from the direction the girls had come from.

They went away chatting and whistling, slowly, like every evening when returning from work at the powder magazine, in line on the edge of the road, which was the only dry part, along the edge of the canal.

Arriving in front of the Faedis farmhouse, isolated among the bare woods and fields, Ernesto greeted the company, took the entrance path and went in to wait for Regina, who was returning with her cousins from the village.

Nini and the others went forward, through the now completely deserted countryside, with the first stars reflecting in the mud.

They soon arrived in San Floreano, and as they did almost every evening they entered the largest tavern in the hamlet. They sat around a table, ordered a liter, and started playing blackberry.

But, after a while, one of the Moors raised his eyes from the table, wiping the sweat, was enchanted and said: "Look, eh!" Nini and the others then turned lazily and saw that she was a beautiful girl: but truly beautiful, of a rare beauty.

"Who is?" said Nini. «Pia?»

The beauty was there, behind the old faded and peeling counter, between a dusty glass candy box and the brass scales. She sat with her back to the shelf, full of bottles of liqueurs and orangeades, and she read, all tidy, elegant, with long straight hair that reached her shoulders, over her dark red dress.

She was an already grown up girl, this Pia: she was already twenty-two or twenty-three years old, although she looked younger, thin and white as she was, with those two eyes so black that they also blackened the skin of her face around them, pale and sweet as a moon. .

Nini knew her because he had seen her as a child, that is, when she was sixteen-seventeen, and it was the first times he went to the taverns, but with

the grown-ups, left in a corner to drink his orangeade. Then Pia left for the city, exactly the opposite of what everyone else did, escaping from the city towards the countryside. But she had an aunt, in Padua or Mestre or Verona, and she hoped to settle down there, they said. It was not known what she then did.

There was some chatter going around, but no one could say anything.

Now, Pia sang on Sundays with the band of a ballroom in Pordenone. But recently, and Nini hadn't been there yet. It was the first time that evening that she had seen her again.

He left his companions around the wine-stained table and approached the counter.

«She is Pia!» she said.

The girl raised her eyes from the Grand Hotel, as if opening them from sleep, looked at him, sweet and almost teary, and said kindly: "Yes." "I knew her before she left!" Nini said boldly.

Pia smiled.

«Now what's great about it? They told me he sings..."

Pia ran a hand over her straight, very long hair, a little

embarrassed, but not like many do, who in moments of embarrassment fix their hair by moving their heads like chickens when they peck: she passed her hand from her forehead, down, along that river of black hair: as if she were suffering a little of a headache, and that's it. And she smiled again: "Yes, I sing, in Pordenone," she said very modestly.

The Nini was like a full bottle, which wanted to pour out all the wine at once, but instead poured very little, because it has a narrow neck. Dance halls, orchestras, singers: imagine!

They were all things that were like a light inside him: the light that had always made him different from others, and when he entered

at a party, he was one of those who, at the party, gave him soul just with their presence. He had always been that way: a citizen, not a farmer. Like Pia. And so he began to talk to her about all those things there, with his elbows on the counter, and the black curl on her forehead: dance halls, orchestras, singers...

«Do you know Nello, the violinist of the «Fiorita» of Valvasone?» «Yes, I even sang with him...» «Good boy!

We've known each other for a long time! Eh, I don't miss a dance party... In Gruaro, in Casarsa, in Casale, in San Floreano, everywhere... Especially in this season, which is carnival!

How is the new hall in Pordenone? I haven't been there yet!"

«It's so refined... A real gentleman's place...» «I'll come there on Sunday! With my mates, if they can... Maybe we'll even rent a car... So we can come and clap her hands when she sings! » Pia looked at him with open, starry and slightly moist eyes, on that dry skin that looked like that of a page, of an angel.

«I'm not a gentleman... who can afford the luxury of going around in a car... But for once the world won't fall apart! What do you want, we get along like this, like poor workers! » “Does he work?” «Yes, at the Mangiarotti, at the powder magazine,»

Nini said proudly.

"It's dangerous!" Pia observed, darkening a little, like a good, wise girl, and still shaking all that Hawaiian hair of hers a little.

“What does it matter to me!” Nini exclaimed. «You only die once!

Eh,” he added, “if I want bread, I have to work!”

"That's it!" said Pia.

"Ah, dog government," said Nini. «Oilè, oilè oilè and with De Gasperi it's not great» she sang, lightly, because women usually don't even want to hear

about politics. Instead Pia simply said, with grace: «Eh, socialism will rise!» «Come back with us, in the car, from

Pordenone?” Nini then said, with enthusiasm, as he felt like hugging her.

And she, simple, available and at the same time reserved: «I'll come.»

«You'll see how much fun we'll have!» said Nini, in a new burst of joy. He didn't think at that moment that he could fall in love with that girl: he spoke to her like that as a friend, out of sympathy, out of similarity of her tastes. He thought, perhaps, that he was having fun, even with her: certainly not that he was taking things seriously. He really liked her, that's all.

“Why,” he said, with a beautiful smile, “don't you put a flower on your head? She would look good on her, with that long hair...”

He took a parsley that was there on the counter with some other vegetables in a newspaper bag, and placed it on her head, just above her ear, on the river of silky smooth hair.

«You see how well he looks!» she shouted.

Pia looked at him, holding her hands on the Grand Hotel above the counter, with those big black eyes of hers, open and pitying that seemed to say: Go home, Lassie!

2

In the middle of the Faedis stable, as in all stables, there was a corridor of stones, with ditches for the dung here and there. On both sides, separated by partitions of filthy and worm-eaten boards, stood the animals, squatting or standing, among the reeds dripping with dung, heating the air like stoves.

In the center of the corridor, under the light bulb that hung from the very high ceiling, the women were gathered, like every evening, sitting in a circle on small benches with work baskets between their knees.

Sometimes the men also stayed awake with them, but almost always they went to sleep an hour or two earlier: the last to go were the boys, those who

were not so small as to fall asleep on their mother's lap, nor so big enough to be manfully uninterested in women's chatter.

Thus a kind of alliance was born - to the detriment of the elderly, the owners of the house: and a cheerful and somewhat reckless atmosphere was formed, which even the old women indulged in.

The chatter had something excited, audacious, and slightly guilty: alone, but gathered together, in the middle of the countryside, which, although the hour had just struck at night, seemed sunk in a massive sleep, they felt an internal thrill of pleasant fear, of freedom.

They laughed at all, especially the young ones, but they were immediately followed by the older ones. As soon as the men left - and they all wished, although they didn't tell each other, that this moment would come quickly - full of false joy if any of the

young people still remained among them - usually it was the younger ones who revisited the topics of the previous evening, and about which they had already laughed so much.

It wasn't even uncommon for someone to have the courage to propose to go and get some wine: and, to tell the truth, they all spent the evening waiting for one or the other to have this courage and make the pleasant proposal. The ones who immediately got up from their banquet to run to the cellar to fill the little blue cocuma with wine were almost always Nesto and Osvaldo, the two cousins of the same age, with their trousers half unbuttoned and on their feet only the large white wool socks made by their sisters. After drinking the half glass of wine that colored the lips like a colour, the happiness became even more general: sometimes, then, we even dared to talk about love.

Cecilia and Nini had never spoken to each other. Indeed, perhaps, Nini hadn't even noticed Cecilia's existence. But, despite this being the case, Cecilia's cousins and companions continued to speak of the two of them as if they were in love or almost... Cecilia, if by chance she had had any thoughts, had certainly not confided in a living soul: and not even with herself, certainly. The thought of Nini only gave her a sort of fright, nothing

else. And, she didn't even dare think about this fact to herself, let alone talk about it...

Yet the cousins, especially in the evening, in the stable, never stopped with their allusions, with their barbs. Cecilia turned red and no longer spoke. She let the Ilde take responsibility for defending her.

One evening, however, Regina, laughing full of cunning and shame, said "the thing" to her boyfriend, Ernesto, while they spent one of their long and chaste evenings by the hearth, where the Faedis left them alone, although clearly supervised.

Ernesto, laughing too, told it back to Nini, at work. And Nini was flattered, and had it explained to him clearly who Cecilia was.

"She's a nice little girl," he thought, "wait until we do something!" He spent a while supervising the Faedis girls' shifts in bringing milk to the dairy, and, on the evening that it was Cecilia's turn, he went to stand on the road, just outside the town, waiting for her to return home, among the frozen fields. and almost dark, despite the last blazes of sunset at the bottom of the plain.

Cecilia appeared down there, between the last walls and the last houses of the town, coming forward along the white road, with the milk cans banging against the handlebars: like a little angel, with those two braids framing her sheep's face.

Nini astride his bicycle, waited for it to pass in front of him, and then started pedaling alongside her, on the dry mud.

Cecilia stared straight ahead, with wide eyes, as if she hadn't seen anything.

"Good evening Miss!" Nini, who was twice as big as her, did it to her, pedaling slowly, slowly, with her legs slightly

wide.

Since she was silent, he continued: «We two know each other! I am Nini Infant, Ernesto's partner.» It was a terrible thing for Cecilia: she was silent,

as she was suffocated, but she didn't bat an eyelid, with her little face red from the cold under her thick braids: she looked straight ahead, and that's it. She wanted to run away, to be dead.

Nini believed that she was silent as little girls usually remain silent, out of duty, out of coquetry, and continued: «She is the most beautiful of all the Faedis! I've been looking at her for a long time! » She pedaled a little

stronger, to observe her face: not an expression of annoyance, fear or pleasure was depicted on it: she seemed deaf or blind: it was as if he didn't exist.

“Do you mind if I walk you home a little?”

Nini asked, starting to get a little discouraged.

The road was completely deserted: some bare branches of sorghum or elderberry, some tangle of thin branches as red as blood, protruded here and there from the bank of the canal. Nobody could be seen or heard. Then, in the air sonorous from the cold, the bells of the Or began to ring at night.

"Can we see each other some other time?" Nini asked.

But Cecilia, terrified, did not respond: she had turned white, and was trembling all over, although she couldn't see it.

“Have you lost your tongue?” Nini then asked, a little

impatiently, addressing her on a first-name basis and suddenly speaking to her as if speaking to a child.

By now, behind the tiles and rows of bare vines, the black shape of the Faedis house loomed.

«Then I'm going back, you don't want me!» Nini said, still as if speaking to a little girl. Cecilia pedaled silently and with a still face, looking desperately towards her house. Then he stopped and started to turn and walk back.

"Goodbye!" he said, a little ironically, watching her walk away.

He hadn't been able to get a word, a smile, or even a look from her. He shrugged, and, whistling, walked back up towards the town with the lights shining against the countryside.

On the day of Regina and Ernesto's official engagement, there was a bit of uproar in the Faedis house.

The boy and girl's companions came: and since it was the coldest period of winter, even the elderly were at home, having nothing to do in the fields.

Among Ernesto's friends there was also Nini, in addition to his older childhood friends. You could barely fit in the large kitchen.

Many were around the hearth, the others crowded along the walls, around the cupboard with the photographs stuck to the glass...

There was also Eligio, ever more crazy, with his hair in his bright eyes, who had brought the accordion.

He cheerfully began to play: "When the rooster crows..."

and then boogie-woogie. The old men and women of the Faedis house

they had drunk a few more glasses for the occasion, so when the young people mentioned wanting to go for a walk, at first they weakly opposed it, like faithful Catholics as they were: then they gave their consent, for a little while.

Cecilia was crouched in a corner, on the hearthstone. And she looked and looked, with those big sheep's eyes of hers, as if trying to make herself small, to disappear.

Nini danced a little with everyone, even with the old women, who shielded themselves by bursting out laughing and covering their mouths with their hands.

But Cecilia didn't go to get her, as if she didn't see her. She had worn the party trousers, the gray ones, all well pressed, and, while she danced, she seemed even stronger and more elegant. Cecilia, moreover, counted so little

on herself that she wasn't even disappointed, because, to be disappointed, she would have had to hope that Nini would invite her: and instead she didn't even dare to think about it.

He still had fun like this: seeing Nini dancing with his aunt Anuta, toothless and a little drunk, or with Ilde, who reached below the waistband of his trousers.

Finally, Nini made up his mind, a little uncertain, perhaps discouraged by the memory of that evening he had tried to talk to her.

Red as fire, laughing only because the others were laughing, but with a laugh that was almost like crying, Cecilia accepted. She knew little about dancing: up until now she had only danced with her sisters and cousins, and she was very careful not to make mistakes.

She was close to him, she felt his chest, his hips as if they weren't real, and their weight, their strength were there by chance and belonged to him so much that their presence was miraculous, more than awe inspiring, it was scary.

They danced until late: the young men left when, in the almost blue countryside, the moon was already high, half drunk, singing.

It was the eve of the Epiphany and it was an evening of great fervor in the Faedis stable, among the women who were queuing.

There was a special joy, also because they had visitors: a young bride, and the Gufa - that chatterbox that no one silenced, with her little girl's voice - who came from the nearby farmhouses.

For two hours there was all the talking, laughing and making noise: so much so that the kids were perhaps dying of sleep, but they didn't intend to miss a word of that evening of joy.

Even when the conversations became difficult, serious, with allusions and condemnations that directly interested only the adults, but whose meaning they understood and made their own, healthily, without bias, with the spirit

of cheerful modesty that they had inherited from their fathers. . It was a question of defending the church against modern life and communism, of exalting the life of the past against the rudeness and unscrupulousness of today's youth, all the Faedis agreed, even if they weren't exactly bigots.

Gufa, on the other hand, was more controversial and, that evening, had enough courage to oppose all the Faedis en masse. The Faedis, however, especially the women, laughed at her, knowing well Gufa's character, and instead of answering for her, they told her, red with laughter: "Shut up, crazy woman, shut up!" But Gufa had left, and with her chatter she overwhelmed everyone: she had a very high-pitched, boyish voice that could be heard two kilometers away from her when she argued with her husband.

Now, although her attachment to the church remained firm and her piety as a good Christian remained unquestioned, she began to protest against the government and almost to defend the communists. The women continued to repeat, scandalized and amused, now almost screaming and happily making the gesture of taking off a clog: "Shut up, you crazy woman, crazy girl!" And for a while the men, with frozen laughter in their eyes, endured her: then they began to humorously retort her, and finally her uncle

Cecilia, Erminio Faedis, who was also a nice guy, with his hoarse voice, began to take on the task of putting her in order.

But the other girl didn't give it up, she proudly raised her head like a rooster, and, small and round as she was, she now represented a real threat to the prestige of the big Erminio, who could do nothing against her screams: the Gufa he argued without the slightest fear of contradicting himself or saying stupid things, just to win.

Then Erminio, loading his pipe with the sound of a locomotive, thought it best to corner her by bringing her facts and examples: "The communists," he said, taking puffs of smoke that sizzled like a damp log, "are all criminals, people who he doesn't want to work! Look here at Rosa, in San Giovanni, crazy girl, that's who I am! Jacu son of Sante Miòr, Rico Quarnùs, and all those little boys, there, Nin Giacomùs, Sigi Pereisson, Pieri Susanna...

Nice people! And then look at the foreigners, those who work at Mangiarotti! I recommend those to you! Tell me: if you had a daughter to marry would you give her to one of those? Huh? To someone like the Nini Infant, »she added, « would you give it to him, say? » «All people without religion!» reiterated old Anuta.

Cecilia listened with her eyes lowered, still as an image, while all the Faedis nodded, even Francesco, the father of Cecilia and Ilde, who was usually the most unscrupulous and cheerfully serene.

But Gufa had already lost her desire to talk about politics: and she vented her last polemical mood by appearing not to take up those topics, and at the same time demonstrating that she didn't want to play the accordion; she began to sing at the top of her lungs one of her two or three favorite songs:

«Always, you can't be happy or even melancholy...» Hearing her sing like that, half strangled and red from the effort, starting with the kids, all of them

and

miserable

a

LAUGH:

the

donne

and

they abandoned

ramshacklely to joy, and so do the girls. Ilde let out deafening screams, worse than the males, and even Cecilia, although calm, with her eyes fixed and a little scared, laughed, laughed...

Then the Owl and the other neighbors went away, and the men also went upstairs to sleep, making the whole house shake.

The women of the Faedis, however, still remained to make up for the time lost in chatting, and began to work hard, gathered under the light bulb. Every now and then they remembered the words and events of the evening, laughing again: then, little by little, a great silence fell in the stable.

Cecilia never looked up again from the linen she was mending, not even at the last few bursts of joy.

She was bent over, with her hair pulled over her forehead and her long braids down her back, heavy: she had made a child's face, perhaps due to sleep, or the heat, and her sheep's eyes shone more tenderly. Then... the oldest of the Faedis had gone to the stable door for a moment to change a little

air, had opened it a little and a piece of night sky, bright as silk, had been glimpsed: the old woman had remained there for a while, pulling her black handkerchief over her forehead, and, looking up, in the profound silence, had exclaimed: «Sercli vissin, ploja far!»(1) Just at that moment Cecilia had dropped her work on the stone floor and ran away, out of the stable. The door was left wide open, and you could see the whole sky, empty, white, with the moon in the middle surrounded by her halo, and a few clouds as light as dust. The women looked at each other in amazement, and the old woman, from the doorframe, shouted across the courtyard: «Cecilia! Cecilia!» The Queen and Cecilia's mother, hastily putting the work down in the baskets, went after her to see what had happened. But they found her already in her little room, lying with her face on the bag, sobbing.

NOTE:

(1) Near circle, distant rain!

3

Pia often went to Gruaro either to do some shopping, or to the hairdresser to get a perm. She went there by bicycle. Nini often waited for her, after her

work, running down to Rosa on her road, and returned to San Floreano together with her.

Their love, which wasn't so sincere in the beginning, to tell the truth, had become increasingly stronger. But Nini didn't think about it: and he was still convinced that he was going with Pia just to have fun. He had already done it with many girls, and this one, although he liked her more, was like all the others, for those things. However, when it came to having fun, Pia didn't do much: and it seemed that she really had no intention of giving in.

She was honest, a good girl: and then all that sly and fatal air, those big eyes although set under the white forehead, which looked up from below, imploring or naive, like those of actresses, that straight hair down to the back, what did they mean?

Nini no longer understood anything: and he was amazed every time; she couldn't comprehend that Pia was truly honest, perhaps even a virgin, and her hopes were engagement and marriage, like all the other girls. AND

not even out of calculation, since Nini, with all his airs of being a citizen, was only a poor worker for Mangiarotti.

Pia accepted their relationship with a somewhat dreamy air, as if it were something that happened not to her, but to one of the girls in her novels: and she continually posed,

silent and good.

When he tried something, she defended herself, more sad and hurt than offended: but it was clear that she had long experience in defending herself. She must have known some men.

One evening, while they were returning by bicycle from Gruaro like other times, Nini just couldn't take it anymore from the desire to make love with her. And he pedaled silently, without speaking.

After Rosa the road towards San Floreano was completely deserted, full of curves: a small country road, which in those days the dry cold made it hard

and white, among the bare woods, the rough and red piles of branches of the venchi, of the sorghum , of the gaggies, which piled up along the canals.

At one of the bends in the road there was a little bridge, with a wash house, under the dry branches: there, they usually stopped to kiss, in the dark of the evening.

Nini stopped, and like the other times he almost bodily took Pia from her bicycle: but instead of leaning her against the wall of the bridge, he pushed her down the path along the water, towards the wash house. There was no one there, just a few autumn birds fluttering here and there on the branches.

Pia let it happen: she understood that, that evening, it was the evening that had to come sooner or later. Nini laid her down on a bit of dry and damp grass, on the edge of the canal, between some brushwood, some red tufts of rams and covered her with her entire large and heavy body.

After he had done it, and out of embarrassment he no longer knew where to hold those rough hands of his, used to using heavy work tools or caressing women very different from Pia, Nini thought with fear of what she might have said or done. . But Pia, on the other hand, said and did nothing. She only looked saddened and amazed, with a deep victim expression deep in her black eyes.

There was silence all around. You could only hear those tiny, lost little birds fluttering or chirping

they remain in the countryside during the winter. They jumped from one branch to another, from a dry elderberry to a dry mulberry, at the bottom of the vines, long as corridors, which ended on the canal, with its black and frozen water, against the grass the color of the dull sun. Then suddenly it appeared among the low trees, with a heavy flap of its wings, and among the low trees it disappeared, a small bird, gray, as big as a pigeon: it flew away as if in a dream. "A buzzard!" said Nini, following him with his gaze. «How annoying not to have a slingshot!» She smiled, leaning just a little on her shoulder, and looking at him with sweet melancholy.

From then on she acted like this, always the victim of him and of her own weakness, and her expression was increasingly reserved and pained.

She spent long hours behind the counter in the tavern, working or reading her magazines, waiting for Nini, dressed and combed as if for a reception.

One night in early December, the countryside and the town were in absolute calm, the calm of a frosty night, when the air is blue and transparent, and, in the moonlight, you can distinguish ridge by ridge, blue, the mountains.

The explosion was sudden, as at the time of the Casarsa bombings: all the windows shook, some shattered, while the rumbling still continued. In their poor rooms, clean as mirrors, on the beds, on the bags, all the Faedis woke up, immediately jumping up. First the boys, jumping out of their straw mattresses made of corn husks, began to run around the house.

Everyone ran up to the small windows in the attic and immediately saw, on the horizon, along the banks of the Tagliamento, a long strip of fire, which, as the night was so clear, made even the walls of the stable faintly red and, below, the vineyard.

A Mangiarotti warehouse must have exploded:

everyone understood it immediately.

Regina, thinking of Ernesto, who was on duty that night, began to cry and scream, with the other women who immediately gathered around her to comfort her, to give her a little hope. Meanwhile, the young people dressed quickly and prepared to ride their bicycles towards the place of the misfortune.

In a few minutes they were ready and left, followed by the shouts and recommendations of the men and women.

They gathered in the stable and began to recite the rosary. Meanwhile the men stood in the courtyard, in a group, looking towards the distant redness of the fire. All the women were crowded on stools or kneeling on the cobblestones, around Anuta who was holding up the rosary.

Only Regina and Cecilia stood a little aside, praying almost on their own: they were as if lifeless due to anxiety and pain.

It was already beginning to dawn: and the sun had already risen when the boys returned. Ernesto was dead, with two or three of his other workmates: the others, including Nini, were saved.

While Regina screamed in the women's arms, Cecilia, desperate, on the sidelines, had in those poor innocent eyes of hers, full of tears, like a brief, fleeting light of joy.

From that moment she began to think and understand something: and she was so afraid of it that she thought she was lost forever.

The following Saturday, like every Saturday, he went to confession. It was as if it were the first time, and he made a long and anxious examination of conscience, before introducing himself to the confessor, letting all the boys, girls and old women who filled the benches pass ahead. Finally he made up his mind, approached the grate, and, trembling, recited the Act of Sorrow.

She told the priest everything: she said that that night she had only been anxious about Nini, that she had only thought about him, and

when he learned that the only dead person was Ernesto, he had had the courage to thank the Lord.

The priest couldn't tell her anything other than that she had sinned, and gravely so, and as for what she felt for Nini, she had to be very careful that it wasn't an impure and forbidden feeling.

Crushed by these words, Cecilia remained silent and was almost on the verge of tears. But the priest continued to speak, and said that, if in the grace of God, any feeling can become pure and legitimate, it is enough to have strength and patience. He also wanted to hear from her about this Nini, who he didn't know. Cecilia stammered what little she knew about it: but meanwhile she felt within herself, with anguish, another weight, another fear, the moment of which had now come, after so long that she had kept it inside, to to break free. With her eyes lowered, in one breath as if it were

her fault, she said that Nini was a communist. But to his amazement, the priest did not show that he found this thing so serious: on the contrary, he almost smiled a little at Cecilia's fright. He observed that Nini was young, that he had a lot of time to change his mind, and that the important thing was, for one, that he was a good boy.

Cecilia ran to her bench in front of the statue of the Madonna, to say and repeat the prayers of penance with orgasm, almost with the fear of not showing herself repentant enough, because, while praying, instead of feeling pain, she felt in the depths of her heart a strange, sweet, entertainable joy.

A few primroses were already on the banks of the canals exposed to the sun and the little lamb was timidly making the meadows green against the still white mountains: so, also because winter suddenly seemed to be over, the last day of carnival was full of trepidation and impatience cheerfulness.

That day, in fact, the kindergarten children had to perform the play, like every year, in front of the mayor and the parish priest. Therefore Cecilia and the others got up when it was just dawn: partly because

they couldn't stay still in bed, partly because they wanted to see the carnival procession pass by.

In fact, shortly afterwards Nisiuti, from a small window in the attic, spotted him: everyone ran to look, leaning over the small, peeling windowsills.

From up there you could see a nice piece of the plain: on the right Rosa, on the left, much further away, San Floreano, and here and there the bell towers of the other towns.

The long masked procession that every year from Cordovado reached Gruaro passed along the dirt road that connected Rosa to San Floreano. There were decorated floats, on the first of which the "Fiorita" of Valvasone was pushing us at full strength, with the saxophone, with the violin: and behind groups of ushers on foot, who were acting crazy, dancing and singing, with their big heads swaying. up and down, as tall as the tufts of the streams at the edge of the canals.

When the very long procession had finally passed, the girls, excited, and with their eyes still full of a strange ardor, changed and quickly went down to the town, to the kindergarten, where they had to spend the whole day preparing for the performance, which was done after lunch, after vespers.

The big hour arrived quickly, even too quickly: all the children of the nursery were already ready, with crowns on their heads, or wings on their backs, crowded behind the scenes. But it was certainly not possible to think of abandoning them to themselves on the stage, especially when they had to dance: experience taught that even if they did well in the rehearsals, at the time of the performance they would panic: and poor self-love of the nuns!

Therefore, the Archangels had been established for many years. After having put the children away, and leaving two or three aspirants, perhaps more reckless than them, to keep them still as they were, Cecilia, Ilde and the others, gloating, finally, even openly, ran to change in the large room of the laboratory to ground floor.

They began, laughing, to help each other thread

the long smocks (the same ones that the Daughters of Mary wore at funerals), washed, ruffled and adorned with silk belts. Then they placed the huge wings on their shoulders, colored white, indigo, purple, according to the layers of the feathers; and finally they placed a large cardboard star on their forehead, in their hair, patiently covered with chocolate foil.

"Ah," said Ilde, during that delicate operation,

«have a perm!» No one, not even the wisest, protested at that sigh.

They all thought about how good the star on the forehead would look with an angel hairstyle, or Joan of Arc. AND

after all, to look at themselves as they were, they had nothing better than the glass windows, which they had open to reflect the sun well.

They looked at each other, trembling, due to the vein of frost that had entered the classroom from the sunny square between the empty houses and

the vegetable gardens, with the burning light: and they laughed to hide the pleasure of seeing each other, although so diaphanous inside the glass, dressed in that way, so much so that they struggled to recognize in their own images the strawberry color of their cheeks, which they considered vulgar, the drop of light in their cheerful eye, the swollen and straight breasts poorly hidden by the rough cloth.

Perhaps because the glass of vermouth at the reception - with all the mothers gathered in the hall around the parish priest, and the wealthier farmers - had stunned them, the Faedis girls remained in a strange festive mood, all excited, all after lunch.

They took advantage of the fact that they were the least important people in the nursery to indulge in such a free and cheerful demeanor that it would even be a little offensive towards others, if it hadn't been for their expansive youth.

«Blessed youth!» the parish priest seemed to say as he took a amaretto from the tray, or drank a sip of liqueur.

They were all crowded together, a little apart, red in the face, and silent with shame, but ready, precisely, to burst into their mysterious laughter, caused by the gesture of one of them which did not seem to have any importance. : it was the very fact that Ilde opened her mouth and swallowed the vermouth that made her laugh.

And yet, now, everything was over: so quickly: all that remained of the party was the return home, through the depopulated town, through the country roads and the slopes as orderly and clean as salt. The sacristan, himself, did not pay any compliments, and without taking the refreshments of the nursery into account at all, he had already started ringing the bells for the function: and, like little black mice, they could be seen passing over the hard earth and the gravel in the square, rubbed by the Bora, the old women going to church.

Upon returning from the function, the Faedis girls, as soon as they arrived home, were overcome by great melancholy.

The sun was still high enough for us to resign ourselves to the end of the festive day. His rays illuminated the empty fields, an immense void, from the walls of the old house, from the pump, from the large walnut tree, to the mountains of Carnia, pale as rags, languidly golden on purple.

How boring, how bitter... Almost as if to make up for it, the girls were revived by a strange surge of joy. They were laughing here and there around the house, taking care of some business from the work days, still wearing their new clothes. But it ended up that the old women kicked them up into the room to change, very hastily. They ran up, stamping their bare feet loudly on the clean-smelling wooden steps.

«Mad, mad!» the women shouted from below.

Suddenly Ilde disappeared. And the others heard her laughing alone in the boys' room. After a while she showed up in the guise of Nesto: what Nesto: those were her trousers, but they had become, on Ilde, enormous and floppy, and those were also her work shirt, all patched up, although fresh from

slightly faded, but it looked like that of a circus clown.

«Come on, let's get dressed too!» the others then shouted, all excited, around the Ilde.

They ran over there and threw away all the boys' stuff: striped trousers and canvas shirts, Wehrmacht caps and English jackets. When all five had dressed up, they went down the stairs, pushing, excited, to be seen by the old women.

At first they gave some signs of disapproval, but then they began to laugh, the kind that only women do, covering their mouths, like naughty girls, invoking the Lord.

However, they immediately told the young women to go back to their rooms and stop, as "every good dance is tiring". But her parents didn't even listen to them. They were wild horses. They went out into the courtyard, already, with the last sun, congealed in a melancholy frost.

The older ones wanted to go to the house of their friends, who they had just left, to surprise them, Cecilia and Ilde, on the other hand, wanted to go and stand on the main road. They ended up arguing and splitting up. When Cecilia and Ilde, alone, arrived running at the edge of the road, the sun was setting behind the Carnia mountain, and its remote and still very sweet light barely touched the rows of mulberry trees, and, tangled along the canal, the rams red like ruby.

When, preceded by a confused noise of footsteps, voices and music, the procession of masks appeared from the street of San Floreano: the floats, now in the shape of a barge, now of a hut, now of a tower, came forward dragging a few pieces of evergreen, a few torn reeds across the dust of the road. Walking in front of the carts, tired from the long journey, were the pedestrians, dressed in the strangest ways: with patched sheets, sacks, old peasant clothes and costumes, and vague rags wrapped around their shoulders. The faces were unrecognizable whether they were men or women, due to the tattoos, the moustaches

fake and the hats pulled down over the eyes.

Between one cart and another, all the way to the end, there were scattered groups of pedestrians, dragging their shoes on the dust, which did not rise, as if it were sand.

Behind the first cart advanced heads two or three meters in diameter, bobbing against the sky, on the little legs of those who carried them: with their mouths wide open and laughing, their eyes fixed and surrounded by wrinkles, and their knobs red and shiny.

But everyone was walking tired beyond belief, almost in silence: even those dressed as women, who were the biggest and thickest, of Carnera's own race.

Further back there was the band wagon, with the players who every now and then started playing again, without conviction: and further back still other big heads, who rolled around with their ears sticking out, like so many hanged men.

Cecilia and Ilde were sitting in an even deeper silence, but all happy to witness that show up close: they were all eyes, crouched with their rough trousers on the grass still a little warm from the sun, yellow as straw, with here and there the greenish tinge of the first little lamb.

They had their caps pulled down on their foreheads and, scattered across their clothes, were strips of streamers, one green, one orange, one purple, one yellow: they looked like this and didn't move.

Little by little the interminable procession, whose head had already turned towards the end among the first farmhouses of Rosa, had almost reached its end. There was still a cart, a little detached, plodding along, and behind it a group of young people, who every now and then, passing a flask around, stuck to it while drinking. By now we could hear the songs of those who were entering the town: and the group of big heads, at the end of the bend, had started to get agitated again: a certain haste took over the rearguard, and some words, some jokes or shouts, passed from mouth to mouth, rekindling the joy.

Two or three young men, before accelerating their pace towards the last revel in their town, stopped, laughing, and stood along the edge of the ditch, just before the bank where Cecilia and Ilde were sitting, in the already almost dark air, and cold, but still pervaded by a vague whiteness. «So, when are the sugared almonds!» one of the young men shouted, in a hoarse voice. "Soon!

Soon!" another replied. "Soon, huh?" said the first. "By force!" the second one said, almost shouting hoarsely, "she's pregnant!"

Meanwhile all the young men, without paying attention to the two rookies blind with admiration, began to give, as one said, a little

of water to the canal, which had been dry all winter. The one who was furthest behind and who had shouted that he had to get married soon, after having rummaged through his trousers with his drunken hands and not finding anything, took the enormous head off his shoulders, which he placed on the edge of the canal: thus he reappeared, on the white wool sweater his black wavy head and his shining eyes: it was Nini, dead drunk,

burning with sun and wine. He too lined up with the others, doing the same thing, arrogant and distracted like an animal, staying there for a long time, as happens to drunks. And he didn't even notice the two peasant boys who had suddenly gotten up from the muddy grass of the bank, and with their hats pulled down over their ears and the colored stripes fluttering around them, had run down, along the platform, shouting until their voices had died away at the end of the rows.

What effect it had on Ilde - every time she entered the room - to see Cecilia's big bag without sheets; and wrapped up in taut blankets. Even though she rearranged him every morning while making the room, with her, it seemed as if a sort of invisible dust had settled on him forever.

The light was already melancholy, even on days of good weather, because the windows of the bedroom looked north, towards the mountain: but it seemed even more melancholy when you shaved that empty and always well-tucked sack.

Ilde looked at him as little as she could, especially in the evening,

when he went to sleep, so gray and clear next to his. He knelt in front of the picture of the Sacred Heart, with the two blessed olive branches underneath, which were the only dusty thing inside the small room, and after saying his prayers, he slipped under the sheets without the joy of the past. .

On the other hand, things had happened so quickly that Ilde hadn't yet been able to get used to it. The summer wasn't even over, the harvests were in full swing, the small red apples from the orchard had just been picked and placed on the racks... And to the harvesting of those apples, which were the property of the Faedis boys, since there were there were only four or five little trees behind the dunghill, Cecilia was still at home. In the joyfully green and red countryside, she had come with the other young brothers and cousins, along the road that divided the farmhouse from the first fields, up to the small orchard.

She had leaned the rough ladder against the small white lime trunks, she had slipped up among the hard foliage, among the little apples that were red, fresh and wild, little bigger than cherries. All the boys shouted and

laughed around, in the family quiet, and even the old grandfather had come down there, dragging the damsels on the grass mixed with hay, stained with lime, and then sitting on the edge of the cultured pool. Every now and then some adults would come along to watch the harvest of those homemade apples, but actually to laugh a little together with the young people. But on the Cecilia there was already a new air, a little

mysterious, very different from the familiar one; an air as if slightly starched, as if too candid, pious and servile, somewhat similar to that of the nuns in the nursery school. She laughed and played too, with the others, but in her presence in her house there was a sort of detachment, a distance that gave Ilde and the other boys a kind of awe, and at the same time a special tenderness.

It had all started with tears and desperate cries, with a pain that no one understood, and which had just begun

to divide Cecilia from her parents and isolate her, as if something had descended on her, something that no longer had anything in common with the Faedis and with the usual life.

No one had been able to notice anything: the other girls' innocent chatter and jokes about Nini had gradually stopped as they had begun, and none of them even remembered it anymore: so much so that the day that Nini and Pia had gotten married, it was May, the first haymaking, and they had passed on the cart, with friends and relatives right in front of the Faedis farmhouse, no one had even thought about Cecilia, who was standing there watching with the others, with the hoe in hand, hot and a little smiling on the first cut hay.

She had kept everything inside, she had done everything alone: only the priest, and Sister Celeste, her favorite of the mothers, knew something... She left shortly after the apple harvest, one day in September: oh, not for long far away, but it was as if it were at the end of the world. The Mother House of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, where she went for her novitiate, was in Vittorio Veneto.

But for some time now she had had the air of nuns in her expression, in her manner, in her behavior in church or at home, and she seemed out of place in that old Faedis countryside, red, blue, dark-green, regurgitating. of corn, with the rows that bent under the weight of the strawberry or ravosto. Especially the males, the young ones, were a little alienated from her. When she left, the cart, the one with the very large rear wheels, as high as a throne, with rough curved edges, was full of girls.

Cecilia in the middle, on the high seat, with the bundle at her feet, and all around her sisters and cousins: only Nisiuti, the youngest of the family, who had now become a young boy, was on the front seat with the whip in his hand, and the blond tuft on his fiery forehead.

At his cry, Marco, the horse he had played with so much as a child, pawed on the dirt of the courtyard,

in the middle of the circle of family members dressed to the nines, in dark clothes, who were shouting greetings, he entered the entrance, left behind the large walnut tree, the pump, the group of family members who were black on the threshold, and turned down the main road towards San Floreano. The Faedis farmhouse disappeared behind the vineyards and groves that lined the canal. In the midst of that great sea of green, with the red and blue country flowers scattered across the meadows, there was the great silence of the summer after lunch. Only the song of a nightingale could be distinctly heard among the bushes and Cecilia's soft crying.

He passed the long road, passed San Floreano with its large square on the canal and the tavern, passed the curvy road, between green galleries, which led to Casarsa; and here are the first walls of Casarsa, smoked, made of stone, on the asphalted road, here is Borgo Pordenone, with its narrow, old facades, the large porticoes, the farmers returning on carts full of hay, some soldiers, some lords, like in Rosa you never see them: and finally the new station, in the square white with dust and lime, silent as a hospital. On the steps of the station there were the two nuns waiting for Cecilia, all anxious and sweating. The cart stopped in front of them, and Nisiuti got out to give the horse some hay, quickly, to enjoy the view of the station, the bar, the trains. The whole group of girls and nuns went to stand, patiently and

anxiously waiting, inside the entrance to the station, empty and burning like an oven.

After a long while, the bell finally began to ring: as if haunted, dragging their bundles, the nuns and Cecilia ran towards the gate, and all the girls behind them, crowding the bars, with the crippled ticket collector who, cheered up, was laughing.

"Goodbye! Goodbye!" they all shouted together. But Cecilia did not turn around, frightened, with the nuns, for the arrival of the train, which was arriving with a terrible roar. They saw it yes

she climbed into an old third-grade carriage, among the faces of students and workers, and disappeared into a compartment, with her long gray calico skirts.

«Goodbye, Cecilia!» they continued to shout at her, especially Ilde, who was crying like a desperate woman. Then the accelerated vehicle started moving, slowly, and was already running when it reappeared behind the building, behind the level crossing, towards the Pordenone curve.

4

That boy lying in the bed in the ward was not Eligio.

The worn face, the long hair, the shoulders protruding from the sheet, looked like those of a thirteen-year-old child.

Even more than white, the skin was of a nameless color, that of the viscera, which have never seen the light; in the reflection of the blankets it was like a yellow spot, but lighter, where the lips and even the pupils could no longer be distinguished, which had also become pale and opaque like the flesh. The bones of his face protruded, stretching from the cheekbones to the chin: perhaps this was what had disfigured Eligio to the point of not being recognisable; but it was his eyes above all; he threw glances here and there, it's true, as if he were looking for a way out, a familiar face, but they were pure movements of the pupils, which no longer had anything conscious about them.

Now he held his arms abandoned at the sides of that child's body, on the blankets: now he raised them, in delirium, and shook them, shaking his head up and down; now he anguishedly hit the wall against which the iron bed was leaning with his closed fist.

It was this gesture of agony that he, with unconscious obstinacy, repeated most often: he looked for a moment in the eyes of those around him then turned his head away and began hitting the wall with his fist again. It was night, and along the ward under the lit lamps, the other sick people were trying to sleep: they were all poor, on their chapped and lifeless faces there was sadness printed more than the disease.

of poverty: a life spent in the field, on a bed of paper, at the greasy table of a tavern, near a hearth shared with enemy relatives. Now they had been brought there, stretched out on those beds and left to lie with their illness: in those eyes there was no other expression left than that of selfishness and amazement. No one turned towards the bed where Eligio died.

Not even the relatives and friends gathered around could arouse any interest; in the ward, which was rather a corridor without windows and without air, where they were crowded together, those were things that happened every day: this was how the poor people had the fate of dying.

Eligio didn't recognize anyone for whole hours, then suddenly he seemed to come back to himself a little: then his father or Onorino, who had gotten used to noticing him for days, came closer to him and asked him if he needed anything. : he looked at them for a moment, and said some unrecognizable words, like a child who had just learned to speak; in reality, he didn't say anything, and confusedly mixed together some syllables, with a sort of sigh or yawn, as if the effort were intolerable.

Nini and Milio came and placed themselves, upon entering, near the edge of the bed. Old Pereisson stood up, and the two friends went to shake his hand: "It's over now," said the old man, and Onorino looked at them both with an expression of fear.

"You don't recognize anyone anymore?" Nini asked. "Yes," said the old man, "every now and then." Nini approached Eligio, bending over the bed;

he stood still, looking at him, with wide eyes on his now very worn face.

Then suddenly he turned away, tiredly waving his arms and pounding his fist against the wall in delirium.

«Eligio...» called Nini; he didn't feel it and kept rubbing his cheek against the pillow and hitting the wall. Then he turned and looked at him again. He didn't have a fever, he was now

Freddo. His lips and gums were dry and pale, his skin chapped; Nini was close to him almost mixing his breath; he even put a hand on his shoulder calling out to him. But he didn't recognize him.

He continued to make his hallucinated gestures, as if gripped by a terrible anxiety.

"The doctor said," Onorino murmured, "that he can continue like this for a long time." Nini looked at him: the boy had spoken calmly, but staring at him with two eyes where one could read an anguish stronger than his imagination.

"Ah, let's hope not, let's hope not," said the father. "AND'

better die now if he has to die." «But it may still be that he remains alive...» exclaimed Nini.

«Oh yes...» Milio said naively.

But the old man, without speaking, bent over his son: "Eligio,"

he called, "Eligio, look who came to see you." Eligio didn't feel it, closed in the spasm by which he was consumed: with his arms immobile, he shook his head slowly, but pressing it forcefully against the pillow. «Eligio!» called Milio. "Nothing,"

said the old man, shaking his head. "Sit down a little, comrades." Nini sat down. Milio was leaning on the edge of the bed. "Ah," said old Pereisson, "he's been ill for a long time." "Yes, I knew it," said Nini, "but why didn't he take care of it..." "He had gone to the doctor once," said the father, "but he

hadn't found anything. And he kept going to the quarry. Seeing him lose more weight every day, until he had become almost a skeleton, I told him: "Don't go to the quarry anymore, Eligio." But he started laughing. «And the shoes for Onorino, and the apron for the mother, with what money can we buy them?» he told me. He continued to go to work until one day he fell ill at the quarry, and his companions took him home." As much as the two friends tried, they couldn't understand how that body was Eligio's.

They had nothing in common. Turquoise, sparkling

of his eyes, no shadow remained, nor of that intense, fixed smile of his: the smile of that evening, for example in Casale, when he started singing in English, with the guitar broom, inventing the words, or that evening when he had torn the flag from its corner behind the wardrobe and waved it over the heads of his companions.

This small, parched face, this white shirt that covered his little naked body up to the chin, but above all this cold fever of his, which made him stretch with the gestures of a child or an animal, made him such a defenseless creature, so weak that pity for him it was stronger than the pain of seeing him die.

Milio was leaning with his elbows on the edge of the bed.

He was wearing his white duster bought with Swiss money, which he treated with such care, and which he wore on special occasions: he looked at Eligio with the same expression as Onorino. Every now and then he distracted himself a little by observing what was happening around him, some nun passing by, some sick person who, already convalescent, got up on his own and slowly put on his shoes. After half an hour, Alba, Eligio's older sister, came in with two or three other acquaintances from San Giovanni. Without saying anything, they stood around the bed and looked at the sick man. He continued to fret, and occasionally sigh in incomprehensible words, unable to remain still for a single minute. Now he stretched out his sharp chin, stretching his neck, now he pressed one cheek on the pillow, as he had been doing all day.

"Eligio," his sister told him, almost crying, "look at me, I'm Alba." (1) He gave her a look. "Yes," she said. Everyone huddled closer to him.

"You understand," Nini murmured, looking at his father; he bent over Eligio, calling him and shaking him by the arm:

"Son," he said, "look how many have come to see you." "Many,

yes," Eligio said, almost distinctly, like a child being celebrated and timidly showing his gratitude. Nini came closer to him, and Eligio's father and brothers gave him their place at the sick man's side, as if their friend had a greater right to it. Instead, Eligio seemed unable to recognize him.

"How are you?" Nini asked him. "Ah, good," the boy replied eagerly; he started turning his head here and there again, hitting the wall. "You have to get well, you know Eligio," Nini told him, bending over him until he almost touched his forehead with a hand; he nodded his head. "Hey, comrade, don't you remember me?"

Nini asked. He turned his head almost suddenly towards him, and quickly muttered an incomprehensible phrase, with such an acute effort that it left him breathless, with his eyes closed, and he continued to nod his head no, as if to make it clear that he understood well. who he was; then he stared at him fixedly for some time: it seemed that something like a smile was born deep inside his dull eyes. He suddenly pointed a finger at Nini, but his arm immediately fell, while he again uttered, groaning, some meaningless words.

"One thing," he seemed to say, "one thing!" And he mentioned, as if with a wink, something that he, Nini and Milio knew well. But he didn't speak, he couldn't say what he was. She had it in her eyes. He wouldn't have been able to say it even when he was strong and full of life, let alone if he could say it now that he was dying.

A few days later the Pereissons' courtyard was empty, swept, as on Sunday afternoons, when the men have gone out, the old people in the tavern, the young people who knows where, in the nearby villages, and the women are at the function.

The piles of reeds gathered against the pillars of the shed; the fagots and wood stacked in order; not a leaf, not a piece of paper on the edges of the trickle that ran from the pump between the tanks in the courtyard, reflected its whiteness, hard, harsh, like that of the sky covered by cloud. Because he didn't blow

a breath of air, the frost was still and insensitive: there was there in the open, in the courtyard surrounded by orchards and immediately behind by the fields, the silence of an abandoned church. The disconnected windows of the families who lived in the same courtyard as the Pereissons were boarded up on the empty galleries. But the silence, at times, was deepened by the sound of the bells ringing from above with their truncated, distant chimes.

In the courtyard, all around, a few dozen people crowded together; and inside the Pereissons' house you could hear slight movements, knocks and knocks without an echo, as if you were going up or down the small wooden stairs. The little gate in front of the kitchen door was open, and in fact every now and then someone came in to see Eligio in his bed, and came out immediately afterwards, with his hat in his hand and his head bowed. They were almost all men dressed to the nines, in black; the women were grouped together, under the balcony that led to the Pereissons' attic, and along the barn, hidden by their black veils.

Standing there, from the door that opened onto the dim kitchen, we could clearly hear, although muffled and distant, sobs. In the midst of a group of men - the young people had almost all remained in the portico - there was Susanna speaking softly with Leon and Giovanni Blasut; every now and then they looked up at the sky, which was heavy and white, and threatened snow.

Perhaps they were talking about the weather and the work in the fields; then suddenly they separated from the group and with caps in hand, crossed the threshold of Eligio's house. The kitchen, clean and fragrant, seemed larger, with its hearth in the middle, black, livid, without a speck of ash and the andirons polished: beyond the door there was only one small window, behind the hearth, from into which a desolate light entered. On the upper floor, one did not go up from the outside, through the gallery, as in the other

houses in the courtyard, but through a staircase, which began in front of the door without swings of a dusty and whitewashed cellar, illuminated by a weak electric lamp, with the barrels of

wine, demijohns, bags, tires. That was the house where Eligio had lived for twenty years. His room was a small room above the cellar, with a crust of lime that had splashed the black beams of the ceiling and the floor of rough, uneven planks.

His bed was an old base supported on two trestles and covered with a mattress filled with corn husks; while that of Onorino, who slept with him, was simply a straw bed, also full of paper bags. Now, however, Eligio was not lying there, in his room, but in that of his father and mother, which was the only one with furniture: the ones that his parents had bought when they married and which they had preserved with such care that they were still like new: a bed, a dresser and two chairs. The room, however, was as large as an attic; the furniture was lost in it, and seemed even poorer and barer, on that floor so clean it smelled. But near the door, now, you could see a worm-eaten table, taken from the kitchen, on which a glass full of water with an olive branch had been placed. The room was full of people huddled in silence around the bed, in the freezing darkness. Susanna and the other men, entering, took the damp branch from the glass and with it traced the sign of the cross in the air.

After a few moments some young men came running up the stairs, almost making a noise, and warned that the priest was coming. Almost everyone went back down into the courtyard, where, in the meantime, the children from the nursery school had already arrived, led by the nuns, and beating their hooves on the pavement they lined up in front of the Pereissons' door, around the small white labarum that one of them was holding. between the little hands inflamed by the cold. And the bells came vibrating against the bare walls of Romans again. Shortly after, the priest entered the courtyard, walking quickly, followed by the little clerics: they disappeared into the dark kitchen, and, somewhere in the house, the sobs broke out louder, since the silence had

made even stronger. You could hear the animals moving and breathing in the stable, and a few sparrows chirping in the garden.

On either side of the whitewashed door, two small garlands had been placed, dark, poor, with the colors of the flowers so pale that they could not be distinguished between the dark green of the leaves and the gray of the stones; and while the people in the courtyard began to prepare to line up, speaking almost in a loud voice, with a sort of relief now, Onorino and Livo approached one garland, Chini and Ivano approached the other, with their light festive clothes. , red from the frost, and tried to lift them and keep them in balance.

Inside the house you could hear noises, knocks, voices, the shuffling of people coming down the stairs and, suddenly loud and close, the moan of the mother who called Eligio by name two or three times, while they were carrying the now closed coffin down.

It was Nini, Milio and the other companions who carried her on their shoulders: they went out slowly into the courtyard, after having carried her down the stairs with so much effort and in silence, and, behind them, came the relatives and neighbors; the priest immediately set off, followed by all the others, towards the door, and, turning down Via Romans, they went in the direction of the church.

NOTE:

(1) Look at me, I'm Alba.